THE ARGOSY.

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GABRIEL'S APPOINTMENT.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW LUCY SAW A WISE WOMAN.

WILD, stormy evening—the wind sweeping in from the southwest, and the long lines of foam breaking with ceaseless violence on beach and rock; sharp arrowy flights of rain carried aslant across moor and meadow, beating against window-panes, and tearing the first blossom from the trees-what could be less like the May of which poets sing as if it were meant for nothing but love and mirth, for dances on the turf by day, and wanderings beneath the moon by night? So might have thought our newlymarried friends, Joel and Lucy Treherne, who were caught by the gale under rather untoward circumstances, while endeavouring to make their way across country to Lowlevels in a somewhat crazy vehicle, calling itself a fly, belonging to the inn at Level Bridge. They had been spending a very happy time among Joel's relatives, and had just left a cousin's farm; availing themselves of this accidental accommodation in preference to an open cart, which was the only alternative, the driver boasting of his intimate acquaintance with every lane and turning, and his capability of conveying them twice the distance with perfect ease to themselves, not to say his horse. As the latter had had a good rest and feed, and was certainly accustomed to the kind of work, Joel decided that the fly might be safer for his bride than the open cart, which he should have preferred had he been alone; but before they had accomplished a third of the journey, he began to doubt the wisdom of his decision. Whether the cousin's parting cup of cider was stronger than Tom Prowse was accustomed to, or had been administered a little too soon after other cups not worth mentioning, or whether his own knowledge was not quite VOL. XXIV.

equal to his self-assertion—certain it was that the distance seemed to increase with the difficulties, and strong doubts arose in the Cornishman's mind whether every step they were taking might not be leading

them further from the place they hoped to reach.

With a private determination to pull up at the first habitation they came to, he kept his own counsel for the present, talking cheerfully to his bride lest her courage should fail her just when she might need it most. But Lucy carried an amount of happiness about her now that made her indifferent to such trifles as wind and rain, stony hills and steep descents, crazy springs and leaky carriage roof. The more she was jolted, the more she laughed; and as to being afraid of anything that could happen, what was there in the way of adventure that Joel was not prepared to meet? It would be rather grand to have some adventure, such as he had described, if only for the pride and pleasure of seeing his strength and cleverness triumph over every difficulty. Was he not the bravest and best of men, the terror of the guilty, the guardian of the helpless, the faithful follower of his captain, the trusted comrade of the Ironhand, who had told her himself that he would rather have Joel at his back than half-a-dozen soldiers? And if the worst came to the worst, and they couldn't find their way, why, it would be like a page out of Robinson Crusoe to make a hut or a tent out of doors; as she was confident he could do in five minutes, though she did not exactly know how.

It must be confessed that Joel by no means shared her confidence. The more cheerily he talked about the good supper and bright welcome awaiting them at Lowlevels, the less he expected to get there under the circumstances; and for some way, in spite of Lucy's suggesting that he would catch cold, sat leaning out of the window, endeavouring to ascertain what dangers loomed ahead. A sudden bump, more decided than ordinary, brought matters to a crisis; the driver pulled up with an ejaculation of dismay, and Joel was out of the carriage

in a moment.

"Shaft splintered-wheel nearly off! Lively travelling, this. Have

you any notion where you are, mate?"

Of course he had—didn't he know every inch of the way? You was old Bess Cheveril's cottage, and one of the worst bits of road in the whole country round. Everybody that knew anything knew that.

What made him come that way, then?

Well, you see, it was not quite the way he meant to come, but being there, they must make the best of it, for they couldn't turn round. Had Bess Cheveril a cart that she could lend them? Yes, but she was not always in the humour to lend it: and it soon appeared that no inducement would make Mr. Prowse invade her territories himself. If Mr. Treherne liked to risk it, he might—the light in the window would show him the house; only he must mind and not damage her garden or her cat, or she would put bad luck upon him for the next twelvemonth.

"Ah," said Joel; "a wise woman, I take it?"

"Just that, and knows more than is quite good for her, they say, and a terrible hand at a bruise, or a burn, or a broken limb, or blight in the orchards, or foot-rot with the sheep—only she'd as soon give 'em as take 'em away, and it's a chance in what temper you may find her."

"I'll chance it this once," said Joel, and he opened the door of the fly. "Lucy, my dear, the weather is holding up just this minute, and if you don't mind walking a little way, you'll soon be under cover; and I'll be bound we shall manage to get a lift somehow."

Lucy was ready. But she found it very rough, and very wet walking, and it had grown so dark that she had no idea where she was putting her feet; she could only cling to her husband's arm, while he held the umbrella over her head, and trust to his ability to pull her out of any peril she might fall into. Prevention being better than cure, he simplified the matter at last by shutting the umbrella, and (as she afterwards described it) picking her up as if she had been a parcel to be handed in at the door.

It was not, however, so easy to hand anything in at first, for no one answered his knock; it required a kick or two to rouse the inmates to the duties of hospitality. An elderly woman unbarred the door, whom Joel recognised as an old acquaintance; but the scared look in her eyes, as they fell upon Lucy, now permitted to stand on her own feet, almost took away his presence of mind.

"Why, Mrs. Medland, you look as if you saw a ghost. I'm sure

you'll let my wife in, out of the rain. Thank ye."

And without waiting for further welcome, he gently pushed his way in, and led Lucy to the kitchen fire. Mrs. Medland followed, holding up her hands and shaking her head.

"I couldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes and heard it with my own ears. Where ever have you dropped

from?"

"Dropped from? We've been dropped upon pretty heavy, all the way from Stoneycrop Farm, across such roads as are a disgrace to the county," said Joel; "but I hope the worst is over now, and if so be you'll help us to a trap, that we may get on to Lowlevels, why, it shan't be with thanks only that we make it worth your while. We've got a sister looking out for us, and she'll be growing uneasy."

"I'll speak to my husband, sir; and see if he can accommodate you—but, dear heart alive, you've put me in such a flutter I don't know which way to turn. She'll want to see you, I know she will, and it will be no use trying to deceive her. Them as do, finds out their mistake too late. You are not afraid, my dear, are you?"

Lucy glanced at her husband in some dismay; he was evidently

puzzled.

"What do you want her to do, missis?"

"Why, of course she'll go in and see the old lady. Hasn't she

been expecting her all day: and me, thinking she was a bit wrong in her head, telling her every minute she'd come, just to keep her quiet. And not a thing will she eat or drink that I can offer her, though the doctor said she was to be kept up, regular—and well he knows me for a cook as nature can depend upon, to be a staff and not a snare. But she's took that fancy into her head that sets her against them as would be her best of friends: and unless you can make her take something, she'll be gone before we know where we are. And then what will become of us all?"

"At it again, old woman?" growled her husband's voice out of the darkness—"always talking, you are. You'll talk too much one

of these days."

"How can you say so, Medland, when I hardly ever open my lips? And you'd a deal better be looking after the trap for Mr. Treherne, seeing as we owes a duty to the old lady to earn all we can for her, and she not able to bargain for herself. I'm sure the gentleman will consider that in the fare, and do what's handsome."

"You get us the trap, and we'll not quarrel over what is right and fair," began Joel, when the sound of three taps with a stick cut him

short.

"That your old lady?" asked Joel, good-humouredly.

"Indeed, it is, sir: and unless your good lady will go in with me, I know she'll be put out. She's not like other women, you know,

sir, and it isn't safe to cross her if you can help it,"

"Then I must go in with you," said he, "for my wife is new to these things, and she'll feel easier if I am there. Step in and say we are coming: and you, old gentleman, just see how you can help our driver in the lane. Look alive now, or he'll think your wise woman has made away with us. I'll come after you in a minute."

He would have gone then and there, but for Lucy's evident terror; she could face anything with him at her elbow, but without him it was a different matter. Nor was the first sight of the old woman, who was said to be expecting her, calculated to reassure her nerves.

Age and infirmity were common sights in St. Edmund's district, but never before had Lucy seen such a face as old Bess Cheveril's. Seated by the fire, with her wrinkled hands on her knees, and her head partly sunk on her bosom, she might have been taken for some sibyl of old. Her hair was perfectly white, and strayed down beneath the cap and woollen handkerchief that formed her headgear; her skin a complete network of wrinkles; and her eyes, partly shaded by shaggy eyebrows, retaining alone in their clear, cold light the vitality which seemed to be dying out of every other part of her shrunken frame. How old she really was, nobody knew; except perhaps Mrs. Salisbury. Popular opinion gave her credit for more years than any reasonable person could be expected to believe in; but neither her sight nor her hearing had suffered, and her present illness seemed to be a mere failing of power—there was no actual disease, only so much

weakness that her life depended on her system being kept up. This, by Mrs. Medland's account, was made almost impossible by her

refusal to accept her services.

As Lucy and Joel entered, the old woman raised her head and looked at them without any appearance of surprise, merely remarking, "So you've come at last." But the voice was so unlike what Lucy expected that her terror quite passed away. Instead of being harsh, or surly, or grumbling, it was peculiarly quiet and sad; and the young wife's kind heart was touched. The poor old thing was wandering, of course, but she should not starve if a kind word would induce her to eat, so she humoured the delusion, whatever it might be, and assumed the importance of an expected guest, who is confident of welcome and sure of approval.

"Yes, Mrs. Cheveril, we are come at last, and the roads are so rough it is a wonder we ever got here at all; but I am sorry to find you are not well, and that you have had no dinner. You should not have waited for us—and I must insist on your having your broth

this minute."

At her whisper, Joel stepped back into the next room to fetch the basin, which had been keeping hot on the hearth; and he gave Mrs. Medland to understand, with a smile of triumph, that his wife was fully equal to the occasion. His triumph was justified by the result, for old Bess made no objection to being fed by Lucy, and devoured the broth and bread with the eagerness of real hunger. When she had finished, she took hold of Lucy's left hand and looked at her ring.

"You made up your mind at last, did you? It was time—it was time. And which of them is it?"

"Which of then?" repeated Lucy, in some confusion.

"Is it the gay, tall, free-handed one?—or the dark brother, whose head is in his books, and is so handy with his tools?"

"Here is my husband, Mrs. Cheveril," stammered Lucy.

The old woman only smiled; her delusion, whatever it was, had its own laws and limits, and Joel's stalwart figure had no place therein. She nodded several times, and her lips moved as if she were talking

to herself before she again spoke aloud.

"You think you have made your fortune, don't you? and that you'll come back here one day, to be a fine lady in your pony carriage, and have the precious stones for your own? That's been in your heart all along, I know, for all your winsome looks and ways. But you'll never have them, and you'll never see the day you look to. And if your master doesn't rue the choice you made, it will be along of his love being stronger and truer than your'n, my maid—stronger and truer than your'n."

"Joel, dear, what does she mean?" said Lucy, almost in tears.

"She is dreaming of something else, poor body, that we have nothing to do with. I'll try her on a fresh tack," said Joel, and

quietly planted himself in front of the old woman, that she might see him without turning her head.

"Mother," he said, gently, "did you know anything of one Jack

Cheveril, who lived, they say, in these parts?"

The clear, cold eyes gazed at him as if to pierce his soul.

"You're not one of the police?"

"No, indeed."

"There has been one of them hanging about here, asking the same question, but I told him nought. Why should I tell you?"

"Because I could tell you something in return."

"About Jack? My poor lad! It's long since I had news of him. He's a clever lad, but he never thinks of writing, though Madam made him a fine scholar. Ah, dear! Come here, my maid, I want to tell you a secret. If you'll help Jack to get the prize, I'll help you. You'll want a friend before you've done; and Jack is that idle he'll never win anything unless he gets a helping hand."

"Well, mother, his working day is over now," said Joel, "so we'll hope he did win something worth having at last. He lies in a quiet corner, and Christian hands laid him there, in the grave I dug."

"She does not understand, poor thing," murmured Lucy; and, indeed, it was very doubtful whether the meaning of the words did reach the wandering intellect. Though they awakened recollections

in her brain, and set her talking again in an altered tone.

"A quiet corner, did he say? Aye, he came down to find one; and they were all hard upon him, and cast up his bad companions in his teeth—and he seemed to hear the very winds whispering and the waters babbling the story that no one was to know. And when he came to me that night his face was like a dead man's, so white and cold and stiff—and he cried like any child on my neck, for he said I was all he had left, and he should never see me again."

There was a short silence. She seemed to be pondering something

in her mind which she could not exactly recollect.

"Four foot from the surface—aye; and the third brick after the second ledge—that's it. And as soon as I am strong again—for I'm a hale woman for my years, as the gentlefolk know—I'll go down to Lowlevels myself some dark night, and see what an old woman can find. They say as some have been frightened there: but there's none, living nor dead, that can frighten old Bess. Man after man has tried his luck, and never found what he looked for. They didn't ask old Bess first, you see, my dear—no, they didn't."

"Did Jack ever talk to you of his mate, Hughes?" asked Joel, on whom not a word was lost. Something in his voice, which compassion made peculiarly gentle, seemed to have its effect on the aged brain, now groping confusedly in a jungle of tangled memories. She looked up at the tall Cornishman with a wistful sadness in her eyes.

"Don't 'ee have nothing to do with Joe Hughes, though he's my own kin. He was the ruin of Jack; and he'll be yours, if you let him."

"He'll ruin nobody any more, mother: he went to his reckoning before Jack did. I'm afraid it was a bit heavy, but we've no call to be his judge."

Her shrivelled hands worked as she sat there, looking at the fire, and the words came dropping from her lips as if she were repeating

a lesson by heart.

"Tell Madam—aye, that I will, my dear—tell her I never meant to do it, and would have undone it if I could—and I wanted to tell her, but my heart failed me. Anyhow I've gained nought, and I've lost everything, and that's punishment enough—and so it is, my boy, so it is, sure."

"Joel, dear, she is growing faint," cried Lucy, starting up.

The old woman had, indeed, become very cold and livid, and it was necessary to summon Mrs. Medland and have her assisted into her bed, whence it seemed unlikely she would ever rise again. All that her goodwill and limited experience could suggest, the young wife readily performed for the sufferer's relief and comfort; but it was with indescribable satisfaction she at last heard that the trap was ready to carry them on. It had been all like a ghastly dream; and Joel felt, when she took his arm, that she was shivering from head to foot. Mrs. Medland, whose demeanour was that of almost servile obsequiousness, pressed her to remain where she was for the night, proffering hospitality with assurances of welcome, as from hardworking folks, who were honest, though put upon; but the bare suggestion roused Mrs. Treherne's spirits directly, and she protested that all she wanted was air.

"You've not far to go for that," said her husband. And so she found; for she had hardly taken her seat in the open cart by his side when the gust of wind nearly carried away her umbrella. Talking was quite out of the question, even if Joel had not been too much occupied with the management and guidance of his horse to have leisure for it. The battle with the elements, however, had a wonderfully reviving effect, and by the time they reached Lowlevels, Lucy was in all the glad

anticipation of her sister's welcome.

The outer gate was barred and bolted; and as Joel rang the bell the deep bark of a dog came back in reply. To the amazement of his bride, Joel set up a peculiar call, well known to Australians, but not usual in St. Edmund's—indeed, Mr. Forrest had asked Martin, as a particular favour, not to introduce it into the night-school. The wind and rain had just arrived at one of their pauses, and the long-drawn "Coo—ee" had a strange effect in the darkness. In another moment the gate was opened, the light of a lantern flashed in their faces, and Martin's voice came cheerily from behind it.

"We began to think you were lost!"

"So did I," was Joel's answer, as he led the horse in; "only I had my good luck on board, and couldn't go far wrong. Here we are, Lucy"—as he lifted her out of the cart,—"and the first

thing you must do is to give your hand to this friend of mine, for

you may go a long way before you'll find a better."

"Say a brother, if she will put up with one out of the bush," said Martin, as he gave the brotherly greeting which the blushing girl did not reject. His hand clasped Joel's for a moment with a tight pressure that spoke the language they both understood. Very few words of affection ever passed between them, but each knew that the other would give his life for him, if need were, as assuredly as both would give theirs for the captain. They all moved on together into the bright, cheerful kitchen, where a tempting meal was waiting for the travellers, and where Nurse Ellis, looking as much at home as if she had been there half her life, came forward to receive Lucy. Everything looked a pleasant welcome: and only one element was missing, which Lucy's eyes sought restlessly in vain.

Where was Grace?

Not at home just then, was Mrs. Ellis's answer: they were not to wait, as she would not be in to supper. With this Mrs. Treherne had to be content. Though much disappointed she remembered how odd Grace had been lately in her ways, and supposed there was some good reason, which would be explained in private. So she concealed her vexation: when supper was ended, Nurse Ellis judged it wise to keep her no longer in suspense.

"It is no use listening for the bell, my dear; Grace won't be in

to-night."

"Not to-night? Where is she gone, then?"

"Well, I don't feel quite sure, for she had no idea of it herself in the morning, and so did not let me know—but I think she is gone to London."

CHAPTER XXVI.

MR. FORREST FINDS A HOLIDAY TASK.

The blow was so unexpected that it was some minutes before Lucy could falter forth a word; but Mrs. Ellis would not wait for her questions—she told her at once all she knew. Grace had walked over to the station in the morning, across the fields—a good long walk, but she said the exercise would do her good—to see Miss Kerr go off with the two ladies, Mrs. Salisbury and Miss Strahan. Miss Strahan's papa had been down to see her, and had returned to town a day or two before, and they were to follow him. Mr. Martin had sent young Robert Medland to show the way, and be of any use that he could; and Robert Medland came back by himself, and said Miss Pyne was gone off in the train—he had seen her face at the window. There was no message and no explanation.

Lucy gasped for breath, and looked at Martin: who shook his head

"I wish I had gone with her myself," he said, "but I got a message that old Bess Cheveril wished me to be there when the doctor called this morning; and that kept me hanging about her place for a couple of hours, and he never came, after all. But I learned something there which may throw a light on the matter. A lodger of hers left this morning, who called himself a London police officer, and who had met with an accident which disabled his right arm. He has been prowling about here lately, in a fashion that does no credit to the force; and it is my belief that Grace is gone with him."

Lucy started up and clasped her hands in terror.

"What is his name?"

"I fancy he has one for every day in the week, but that Joel and I know him as Wily Wilkins: and, if so, that your sister knows his real name, and what he is doing. Stop, sister Lucy—hear all I have to say. I believe in Grace as you do; and that if she is gone with him, or after him, of her own free will, it is as a brave, faithful woman, to pull him back from ruin, and stand between us and the wrong he means to do!"

A terrible suspicion was creeping into Lucy's heart: but as if she would forcibly drive it back she turned almost angrily on the speaker, to ask what made him suppose her sister would care like that for any man in England. Here was Mrs. Ellis, who knew, if he did not, that Grace had always been true to one who was to come for her some day, perhaps very soon; that it was only the weary waiting that made her look so ill—if he would only come back it would be all right. But Mrs. Ellis had no cheering response to make.

"Ah, my poor child," she said, sadly, "I'm afraid your sister knows too well that she has nothing now to look forward to, except from the mercy of God. She has bravely kept it to herself, but I see it all, and wonder that she has held her head up as she has."

"Is Darch Williams dead?" whispered Lucy. It would indeed be a mournful end to all the hopes connected with his name; but why had Grace kept it from her.

The good nurse shook her head. "No, my dear; if he were dead, the trouble would be above board, and easier to bear. What would your life be, Lucy, if instead of driving up to the door, with your good husband to bring you in, as something he is proud to show, you had to steal out at his call to meet him in lanes and corners, afraid of being seen, and yet more afraid of not being able to go—knowing all the while what people might say and think, yet taking the blame lest suspicion should light upon him? This is what Grace has been doing—and I leave you to guess who she would do it for."

Lucy covered her face with her hands. She saw it all; the only wonder was that she had never seen it before. If that Mr. Jones, with his cough, who professed to be Darch's messenger, was Darch himself, all that had seemed strange in Grace's behaviour was accounted for. But oh, how grievous was the disappointment: how heavy the

fall! The loyal belief in which she had grown up could not be overthrown without a shock: after succumbing for a few moments, she made a passionate effort to shake off the conviction. Grace would do nothing wrong; if it were indeed Darch, there must be some reason for her keeping the secret, which would be cleared up in time; and, meanwhile, she would not be the first to turn against him, after thinking of him as a brother all these years. They always knew he had enemies; and perhaps he only wanted fair play, and a true friend, to get clear of difficulties and start fresh. She looked from Joel to Martin, with tears in her eyes, to see if there were any hope or encouragement in either face. Neither of them spoke for a few minutes; but Joel passed his great hand caressingly over her hair, and Martin stooped over Settler, which lay as usual at his feet, pulling his ears thoughtfully while considering his reply.

"I tell you what," he said, abruptly, as he looked up, "I have done for Grace's sake what I would not have done for anyone else—I have been content to keep guard against the fellow, and have let him alone, rather than drive matters to the worst and break her heart; but I am not sure that I have done right—quite the reverse, most likely. Anyhow, my little sister, you may be sure of this—that we'll do what we can for her and for you. If such a woman can still hold on to such a man, why, there is a chance more for him than I thought he had; but if we find she is gone against her will, Joel and I must lay our heads together how to get her back again. And when we do that, we generally hit upon some-

thing, corporal, don't we?"

"Aye, aye," said Joel; "but it would be my duty now."

"Nothing of the sort—you have your wife to look after; that is your first duty. Is it not, nurse?"

"And will be yours some day, sir," she replied, "and I hope I

shall live to see it."

"Mine?" His brow contracted, though he laughed, and his eyes seemed to glow through their long lashes. "Who would have a vagabond without a calling, or a home, or even a name? Come, Settler, it is time to go on our rounds. If we are ever missed, it must be for our good service; no sweet eyes will grow dim with watching for you and me."

The dog was on the alert directly: but no one else moved, and no one spoke till he had left the kitchen. Then Joel turned to his wife, and looked wistfully in her face; it was a more critical moment for their happiness than either knew. Well was it for Lucy that she had learnt in a school which taught the blessedness of putting self last. In her husband's uneasiness she for the moment forgot her own.

"Go after him, directly!" she said, dashing away her tears. "If he can speak as he does of Grace in her trouble, I am sure he has a tender heart, and knows what it is. Don't mind me—I am going

to unpack and help Mrs. Ellis."

And not till he was quite out of hearing did she give vent to the burst of weeping which she had hitherto held back. So ardently as she had looked forward to that evening—so happy as she had felt the moment they arrived—and now—if it were not for Joel, she should be miserable! In the meanwhile, Joel had followed his friend: who, with his gun on his shoulder, was just commencing to patrol the exterior of the premises. As Treherne would have spoken, Martin lifted a finger.

"Now then, Bob," he said, imperatively, "time to turn in! Look

sharp!"

The slouching figure of his adherent came out of the darkness at the word of command, and obediently entered the house. Martin watched him up the stairs, and then came back to Joel.

"Why did you not stay to cheer up your poor little wife?"

"Because my mate wants me more at this moment. She could see that directly; women always do. How has it been with you, Ironhand? You have heard and seen nothing queer to shake your nerves?"

"What do you think my nerves are made of? The sight of a woman's tears knocks all the fight out of me. That poor thing, Grace, had it all her own way—I could do nothing against her, as she put it to me. However, I have kept him out of this house—he has done his best to get in, and it didn't answer."

"What possessed you to take on that fellow Medland?"

"I can hardly say; but I rather think I have puzzled them by doing it. He, of course, reports to his parents all he sees, and probably a good deal he doesn't see; and it tends to keep them away. People know now that I have a fidgety trick of letting fly at any doubtful object within range, and they don't fancy a peppering, even by mistake."

"Then you don't really trust him?"

"Trust him! No, indeed. But I know he is safer inside, under my eye, than outside under other people's; and he has shown a kind of crouching attachment to me, in spite of being tampered with, that I may raise into something. I have kept him sober, and got a good bit of work out of him; which is more than Madam could do, at any rate."

"You have seen a good deal of that pleasant old lady?"

"I have been backwards and forwards, to please the young one, poor child—and to speak to Miss Kerr."

"I hope they made it pleasant to her."

"She looked bright enough. She is made of brightness, I think."

"She has had a taste of dark weather, too. At least, she had when we first saw her."

"Ah, I have thought since, if I could but have laid a finger on one of those fellows in Paris, I'd have made him remember that morning. So slight a thing as she is, you wouldn't suppose she had so much in her, but it is wonderful what she can do with those little

hands, all cleverness to their very tips; and her head is full of ideas, and histories out of books, and yet she is as simple as a child in some things—more of a child than that poor girl for whom we found the nugget. It went to my heart to see how tender Alice was with her, just treating her infirmity as something too pitiful to be angry with, or laugh at. The grandmother noticed it too, for I have seen the tears in her eyes when she was watching them."

The reticent Ironhand seemed to have changed his nature, and Joel, who had lighted his pipe while listening, drew conclusions with every fresh whiff. The voice, the language, the sentiments were all softened by the intercourse with ladies; and yet there was a sadness about it all, as if the hunter felt in earnest what he had so scornfully expressed—that between him and them lay a

chasm that he could not overleap.

The gale had gradually gone down; the rain was only pattering gently among the leaves. There was every prospect of a quiet night and fine morrow. Martin took pains to show his companion all his fastenings and precautions, that he might attend to them should he be absent. More than once, he stopped to listen, holding his gun ready; but nothing occurred that seemed even to justify such watchfulness. It struck Joel in rather a ludicrous light; and when they were again in the house he intimated as much.

Martin made no answer, but beckoned him into the hall and

showed him the old clock.

"What would you have thought to see me sitting in front of that with a six-shooter in my hand?"

"That you had found a new way to kill time," said Joel, smiling.

Martin smiled in return.

"Well, when it came to this—that a clock, which wouldn't strike when I left the house, was striking like mad when I got back—it really seemed as if time did want looking after."

He described the scene, and Joel's smile passed away into grave

earnestness. "Let us have a look at the inside."

The holiday scheme agreed upon by Philip and David Forrest had been actually carried out; and on the day following that of Mrs. Salisbury's departure, Dr. Nelson was taken by surprise—the brothers walking into his surgery as if they had stepped across the road to consult him about some trifling attack. His pleasure in greeting such old friends was of the mixed nature common to busy practitioners; he insisted on their leaving the inn directly, and making his house their own, and then had to trust to their entertaining themselves as best they might, being summoned in the middle of his dinner to drive a few miles in the dark. However, to men who wanted brain rest, the hills and valley of the Level were refreshment enough in themselves, and they were out before sunrise, drinking new milk, and making friends with the early labourers; and so effectually tiring themselves long be-

fore breakfast that, but for very shame, they could have gone to bed again. Their host, who had been up nearly all night, took the morning hours more quietly, only appearing as the letters were delivered. Intent on his hospitable duties, he was laying them aside, when his eye was caught by Mrs. Salisbury's handwriting. A misgiving of evil made him open it at once and run his eye over the contents.

"My dear Doctor,-I know your friendship for me will pardon my making you a sharer of my trouble. I am in great trouble—how great I cannot explain; but some of it you can imagine for yourself, when I tell you that between Highlevels and London I was robbed of my jewel-box, and that in so ingenious a manner that it has quite shaken my nerves. The box, which, as far as I know, was never left unwatched, was exchanged for another looking so like it that my old eyes never detected the fraud till I tried to unlock it this morning. How it was done, how the thief obtained a sight of the original cover (for it was that which was so well imitated) and how the actual exchange was effected, we have still to ascertain. At present my judgment is at fault; I feel as if I could trust nobody. We have kept it from our poor child, and shall do so as long as we can. Her father is gone to consult the police authorities as to the safest method of proceeding, whether by open reward or secret negotiation. I leave that to him at his particular request, his daughter being the party most interested in the matter, but to you I must confide a part of the story that gives me serious anxiety.

quiet, respectable young woman who is now at Lowlevels. She came all the way to the station to see Miss Kerr before she started, and was of great service to Bilson in looking after our luggage. Our anxiety to keep poor Myra from drawing attention to the jewel-box by her remarks, made me leave it in Bilson's keeping, while we amused the child until the train came up. Bilson's account is that she wanted to get some change at the booking-office, and asked Grace to guard the box till her return. We had some time to wait, and Bilson says that she left Grace alone about ten minutes. At any rate, they brought it to the carriage between them, and a minute or two before the train started we saw Grace rush past towards the further end, but for what object we could not tell. She was not on the platform as we moved away. The box was carried up, into my room in these lodgings, the door of which I kept locked. Sir Jesse having made an appointment with his friend the R.A. to come and inspect the picture, it was necessary that the diamonds should be unpacked,

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"You remember prescribing, at my request, for Grace Pyne: that

one must have been in the plot; the only thing overlooked was a piece of scarlet ribbon, which Alice Kerr tled on at the last moment. "If you ask me what my own feelings are at this moment, I can

cover, the strap, the address, had all been so well imitated, that some

and it was in attempting to do this that I discovered my loss.

truly say that the pecuniary loss, though irreparable, is the lightest part of my trouble. The diamonds were to be Myra's portion, and I have struggled hard to save them for her, but to myself they are only a hoarded memory, and one full of pain. It is the thought of treachery that oppresses me most—the self-reproach for having imprudently put too strong a temptation in a fellow-Christian's way, and the dread of casting suspicion on one who may be innocent. I can write no more—my hand and eyes are alike failing me. I trust to your prudence as well as to your kindness; if you can find out anything for me, you will. I am haunted by the recollection of the civil stranger, calling himself a London police-officer, whom Bilson believes to have been an old acquaintance of Grace Pyne's. Find out if he is still in your neighbourhood."

"Why, Frank, old man, do all your patients send you such formidable reports of their cases? Drawing Priam's curtains at dead of night was a joke to this. Courage, man! Has the plague broken out, or what?"

"A plague spot has appeared certainly, Philip, but it is more in

your way than mine. I shall be glad of your advice."

He explained the business and showed them the letter. David Forrest bounded in his chair as he read. "Grace Pyne!" he shouted. "Why, she is one of my guild—as good a girl as ever breathed. I would as soon suspect Thirza. Come, Phil, make haste with your breakfast, and we'll be off to Frank's place: or rather, Bruce's, as they say she is there. Whoever has played the trick, you will see Grace Pyne had no hand in it, poor girl."

"I hope not. But one thing I must tell you, Davie, which I heard last night," said the doctor: "she did not go back to Lowlevels. A fellow Martin sent with her declares she went off in the train His word is not worth much; but, there is the fact—she is gone."

"And this person mentioned in the letter—the civil stranger—what of him?"

"What, indeed! He went by the same train."

There was a thoughtful silence. The holiday of the two mission-priests was over: they could think of nothing but the question before them. To go off to Lowlevels and consult Martin was the first decision arrived at, and only prevented by the appearance of Martin himself. He had heard of the disaster from Miss Kerr, and his present visit was to ask the doctor to call and see Mrs. Treherne, who had been fretting all the day before about her sister, and had taken a chill besides, according to the nurse's account; and the news that morning had made her quite ill. Dr. Nelson promised to go, and inquired if Grace had written? Not a line, but they had put a little pressure on Bob Medland, and he had owned rather more than he would at first. The Londoner, with whom he had been secretly on very friendly terms, had met him near the station, and persuaded him

-how, it did not much matter-to do a little job for him. He was to go to the room where Miss Pyne was waiting, and to ask her if that was her pocket-handkerchief-showing her one wrapped up in paper. If she knew it again, Bob was to say that the person who brought it was taken suddenly ill outside, and begged her to go to him for a moment. That he did his errand, and that Miss Pyne looked dreadfully upset and as white as a ghost, and begged him to stay in the room till she came back, and then went off like the wind. His curiosity induced him to follow her: but he could not make out where she went, and knew nothing more till the train passed him, when he caught sight of her face at a window, looking like death. A strange, confused statement, intermingled with sundry equivocations and vows of penitence, all betraying the fact that the speaker had been indulging in his favourite sin; but with sufficient truth in the outline to confirm previous suspicions as to the author of the fraud, and the cause of Grace's disappearance. A council was held by the three gentlemen, in which Martin took part, with a disregard of his usual punctilio, that showed how entirely he had forgotten himself in his interest for others. If they had been seated round a camp fire in consultation about a lost trail, he could not have spoken more freely, or been more at his ease. On being asked what Miss Kerr had written, he brought out a well-used pocket-book, in which Alice's letter had been carefully stowed away after the contents had been learned by heart. It was the first he had ever received from a lady, and it was almost reluctantly that he allowed it to be touched by those to whom it seemed a very ordinary matter. The writing was large, bold, and irregular-looking, David Forrest observed, as if the young lady had been using her brush instead of her pen.

"She can handle both," said Martin, rather resentfully: "and a

burnt stick into the bargain, if she can get nothing better."

"It looks like it," said David, quite unaware of giving offence. "But she is quick-witted, and I am very much disposed to think she is on the right track."

He read the letter aloud.

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"Greville Gardens, May -.

"Dear Mr. Martin,—You will be surprised at hearing from me, though I promised you should if I wanted anything done. I have just been to see Mrs. Salisbury, according to appointment, and found, to my horror, that her diamonds had been stolen. Only fancy the box being changed at the station, and her only discovering the fact the next day! The state that Myra was in about the jewels compelled us to keep the box out of her sight, and it was popped into the carriage almost at the last moment, and hidden under the seat. But for that I might have seen that it had no scarlet ribbon, having tied a piece on myself. My time was taken up with Myra and her cards; we gambled

for enormous sums on scraps of paper nearly the whole way, to prevent her making mysterious signs and drawing everybody's notice. You will hear the story from Dr. Nelson, but I want you to be the one to tell Grace, and to assure her that no one in their senses would ever think it was her fault. I know she is all right, though Bilson, whom I don't the least believe in, tries to make out that she must have known and helped the thief. Don't you remember my telling you I had heard that cough? I was sure some one was after the diamonds, and it was all so cleverly managed that it must have been your friend, Wily Wilkins. But who was it that helped him? That is the puzzle. I think it was Bilson herself, but I could not say so to Mrs. Salisbury. Direct to me here for the next few days. do not know how this will affect my plans, but I found a note from Miss Ford telling me they were to start for the Continent in a week, and that I was to go with them to meet Mr. and Mrs. Bruce. I hope the diamonds will be heard of before I go.

"Yours very sincerely, "ALICE KERR."

"That is a daring hope," remarked Philip Forrest, as the letter was returned to Martin's pocket-book. "Depend upon it, the

scheme has been too deeply laid."

"It has been deeply laid," said Frank Nelson. "What is more, it has been at work much longer than we can fathom at present. There is some mystery about those diamonds, and it is a very singular coincidence that they should disappear like this, just when I had prevailed on Mrs. Salisbury to have them thoroughly inspected. We are quite among friends, and I mention no names, but if we could arrive at any individual whose interest it was to prevent that inspection, it strikes me we should not be far from the trail of the railway robber."

There was a pause. It was first broken by Philip Forrest: who asked if the jewels had ever been out of their owner's keeping.

Yes, the late Lady Strahan wore them at a ball shortly before her last illness. It was well known at the time that there was a considerable unpleasantness between the widower and his mother-in-law about their restoration after her decease. Since that period they had always been in Mrs. Salisbury's possession.

"Then the last person, who had them in charge before, really was

Sir Jesse Strahan-and his daughter was to inherit them."

"Exactly so: but her inheritance depended on the pleasure of the grandmother. They were no heirloom."

The recollection of certain hints thrown out by Mr. Herbert made the brothers look at each other significantly. Philip asked again if there was any clue to Sir Jesse's motive for wishing to retain the jewels.

Dr. Nelson only knew that the marriage had been an unhappy one, and that it was at her daughter's earnest entreaty, as a means of pleasing her tyrant husband, that Mrs. Salisbury lent her the diamonds. They were much talked about at the time, on account of

their size and beauty, and were supposed then to be Lady Strahan's own property.

"In fact," suggested David, "they were a voucher for her hus-

band's solvency-supposing it to have been in doubt."

The same idea crossed all their minds. Philip remarked that they must be careful what they said, or even thought, without evidence.

Upon which Martin quietly rose and took up his hat. "I know where to get that evidence for you, Mr. Forrest. I shall be off by the night train. Have you any commission to St. Edmund's?"

"Why, Ironhand, what now? Whose evidence do you mean?

Who knows Sir Jesse there?"

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CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BREAKING OF A BUBBLE.

THOSE whose experience of London has only been of the summer closeness, the early winter fog, or the late winter frost, have little notion of what the great city can look like on a really fine morning in May. We do not say that an east wind may not blow. as it probably will-but that does not matter; the bright sky, the sparkling water, the peculiarly vivid green of the trees, the stir of the busy life around you, whose pulses seem to be sharing in the renewed strength of spring-time, invest the whole with a charm which it would be hard to believe in on a dark November day. The difference that a week's warmth will make is one of those yearly marvels which never pall on the imagination; and Alice Kerr, returning to Greville Gardens from North Devon, felt the stimulus in every vein, and no longer wondered, as she had been doing, why the season should begin in May. True, nature was lovely then, and delightful the repose of the country; but here was the great stream of thought, and action, and power, rolling along to the still mightier sea, and the sound of its waters seemed to treble the energy of brain and hands - as if nothing could be impossible for art and genius to achieve with the world of London looking on.

She had awakened to find herself famous, in a manner of which she had never dreamed. The story of the abstracted jewels had given an immense interest to the drawing in which they were portrayed; and everybody who had the slightest acquaintance with anyone concerned was beset with applicants for introductions. The press had taken up the subject, and some flattering mention had been made of the picture and the "orphan heiress of that priceless heritage, a father's genius," and Sir Jesse, had it so pleased him, might have sold his bargain at a considerable profit. But as he observed, with his grave smile, a daughter's likeness was not exactly a marketable piece of goods. He was obliged, however, to admit the crowd

of visitors who thronged to see it, as well as to allow of its careful inspection by the police; but, as he said to friends in confidence, all this publicity was fatal to the recovery of the jewels; and as one element of attraction was the artist herself, he may have put a little pressure on the instruments by which she might be quietly taken out of the way. At any rate, Alice received an intimation from Miss Ford that they must start the next day, so as to accomplish their journey before the summer heat began; and half a dozen engagements made for her by the Carrolls must be given up, if she would

not lose her opportunity of meeting Gabriel and Edith.

It was a great deal too bad, Tiny said, when she had got a lion to show, to carry it off just as it was in fashion. By the time she came back her story would be forgotten, and nobody would care whether they saw her or not. However, as it must be, they would make the most of their time; and perhaps her sudden withdrawal might create almost as much sensation as her presence. carried her young companion off to a large afternoon party, one of the most brilliant of the season; and Alice found so many people coming up to talk to her, that she was obliged, in self-defence, to bring up all her reserves of conversation, and knowing nothing whatever of fashionable politics, talked of things she liked herself, and was pronounced to be deliciously original. To all invitations, however, she had to return the fatal answer, "I am going abroad tomorrow," and as Tiny had foretold, this added to the zest with which she was pursued. It was all very pleasant at first, but Alice was growing rather tired of being drawn out, when, to her great satisfaction, Hartley Carroll made his appearance and took her at once under his special care. She thought he looked rather fagged and worried, and wondered at his giving himself the trouble to come to so crowded a party after his day's work; she did not guess that he had a nervous fear of being missed, and of its being supposed that this was from any serious reason. On her expressing her wonder aloud he only laughed, and said she looked the more tired of the two.

"Come in here, and have some strawberry ice—or strawberries and cream, whichever will spoil your dinner most to your satisfaction. What a thing it is to be able to forestall one's pleasures in this way, and get tired of a thing before it is in season! You are just in time

to eat your strawberries before they are vulgar."

"That is what I cannot understand," said Alice-"why a thing

should not be just as good when there is plenty of it."

"You would soon understand it, though, if all these good people suddenly began to take as clever likenesses as yourself, or if everybody's grandmamma had a Begum's parure to lend and lose. Rarity is a point we cannot afford to overlook; and you evidently know it as well as I do, by your running away to-morrow."

"That is Miss Ford's doing. She is afraid of the weather be-

coming too hot."

"I should not wonder if she had made London too hot already for poor Burlington. Fancy there being people in the world—some of them, most likely, eating early strawberries here at this moment, —who are base enough to bet that she will never marry your great friend till the diamonds turn up again!"

"But the diamonds were not his, so he could not give them to her."

"Their not being his had nothing to do with it; he never regards trifles of that description. It might rather add to the pleasure of giving them away. Ah, Miss Brassingham," as an elderly lady, her age wonderfully concealed by her well-preserved complexion and handsome dress, advanced, "I missed you yesterday, and am in arrear with news in consequence. What is the last great discovery?"

"That the Salisbury diamonds have been found in a carpet bag on Hammersmith Bridge. I assure you somebody said so just now—or something nearly as true. What has become of Clare?"

"What, indeed? I have no means of knowing, not having seen her since the morning."

He caught a suggestive glance from the lady, and introduced Alice,

whom Miss Brassingham greeted most cordially.

"Find us seats, Hartley, for pity's sake, and let me have a talk with this clever little creature in something like comfort. You wonderful person, how did you contrive that likeness of good Thirza Forrest? I never saw anything better done—the way that cap sits on her head, as if it would slip over her nose the next minute, is as inimitable as the forced wakefulness of her eyes. You can see she is trying not to go to sleep, and I am sure she must have had a nap sometimes, in spite of you."

"I was rather glad of her naps," said Alice, with perfect truth; "they gave me time to draw the details. I could idealise her expression, but not her cap. That I had to copy exactly, for it was beyond my skill to invent."

"And you call that idealising, do you? It is well to know what those grand words mean. In Myra Strahan's likeness you seem to have gone to a queer school for your ideality. I only wonder you didn't sketch in the Tempter looking over her shoulder. Hartley, there, would have got him to sit to you."

"Thank you," said Hartley, coolly, "my interest in that quarter is gone. You must ask Miss Ford."

"Poor dear Helen! It is well she does not hear you. I am told they had an unpleasant quarter of an hour when she heard the diamonds were gone. She has left off believing in anybody, so he may talk for ever to no good. Those jewels are the most unlucky I ever heard of. Of course you know all about them, Miss Kerr?"

"Their size and setting I know pretty well: but not their story."

"Then you are in luck, at any rate," said Hartley, "for here sits the oracle to whom no story, to anyone's credit or otherwise, is ever altogether unknown. The marvellous gift of biography

photographic principles was hers, I may say, from her cradle. Not that I ever had the pleasure of seeing her in it; but fame declares that she was the terror of governesses and elder sisters as a walking register of everything they said or did—especially of what they would rather not have registered at all. Confess, cousin Maude,

that I am only doing you faint justice."

"Very faint indeed. I am no more of a gossip than my neighbours. It is much safer to know a little about the people you are with, than to go blundering about among their cupboards, letting out the skeletons when they are least looked for. And some people's skeletons are really awkward pieces of anatomy—specimens that Frankenstein might have put together; and as difficult to deal with as his own. If Miss Kerr pleased, I have little doubt she could tell us that she heard the rattling of bones at Highlevels.

"Yes," said Alice, ingenuously, "there was a mystery, I thought, about a picture I copied; but I did not like to ask questions."

Miss Brassingham did not rest till she knew the whole. course, my dear, I see who that must have been-the pretty lady'smaid, whom she brought up and trained herself, just for her two boys to fall in love with. Of anyone else I should say it was a weak foolish thing, but Mrs. Moreton Salisbury is neither, and never could The girl grew up much prettier than she expected, I darehave been. say; and after her husband's death (he was an invalid for some years, a younger son of Baron Moreton's, the famous judge, and took her name on their marriage) the lads had matters very much their own way: and a curious way it was. The eldest was all for sport and amusing himself; his brother was scientific, and philosophical, and odd, and they nearly ran through the estate between them. Myra's mother was much younger than either. Well, the long and the short of the story is, that the young lady was admired by both brothers, and encouraged them both. The eldest went to his mother, and declared he would marry her; of course she objected, and sent the girl away to a friend's house. And there, it appears, the philosopher found her in tears, and it ended in his marrying her, keeping it a secret as long as he could, while he was straining every nerve to earn an independence. An old friend of his father's, a civil engineer, forwarded his views, and the young man was so clever that he actually patented some invention or other, which brought him in a good sum, and then he confessed the truth to his mother, and she was very good to him, and invited them down to His elder brother was in bad health; it was plain Highlevels. he could not live long: and the young woman fancied she was going to be lady of all she saw, and get the diamonds; and she did so comport herself towards high and low that the mother's patience failed her at last. Actually, Desmond Salisbury was worked upon by his wife to ask for the jewels-things he would never have looked at except for scientific purposes; but for peace and quiet he chose to

do what he must have known was disgraceful, and the wind-up was a breach between mother and son. Desmond went back to London. dropped the family name, and was known only by his father's; and though his wife died soon after, he made no attempt to conciliate his His old friend the engineer, who had made a good fortune himself, and helped to make his, had so high an opinion of him that he took his part in the matter, and left him trustee to his daughter-a bad business for the daughter, as it turned out. Desmond speculatedgot into difficulty-used the trust-money to get out of it, and swamped nearly the whole. I don't know the rights of the business, for his friends and Miss Wyatt's combined together to hush it up as much as possible. His mother only knew a part, and did all she could to rescue his name, but was not able to save him from the results of his In a fit of despair he suddenly absconded, and that with so much precaution that no clue to his whereabouts could ever be It was years afterwards that an Australian paper contained obtained. the announcement of his death; and in reply to all the inquiries made in consequence, nothing could be ascertained. The announcement had been sent anonymously, with the remittance, and the paper had been destroyed. If anyone out there knew the secret, it was well kept, and nothing more was ever discovered. The only person who might have known something was Sir Jesse Strahan, who had been Desmond's friend; but though he professed to be as anxious as a friend ought to be, his anxiety led to nothing but his ultimately marrying the young sister, very much against her mother's wish. She was then the only child left to her, and shared some of her second brother's eccentricity; which, perhaps, made her mother afraid to oppose her too strictly. The marriage was not a happy one; that I know from the best authority; and for any flightiness on poor Myra's part the gentleman may thank himself. The unlucky diamonds, as everybody knows, were worn by his wife at a great ball, but everybody may not know that it was at her passionate entreaty that they were lent for the occasion-Mrs. Moreton Salisbury fearing for the effect on her mind if she refused."

"Had Mr. Desmond Salisbury, or Moreton, any family?"

"I believe there was a child that died; I do not know if there were any more. Here comes Sir Jesse himself. I wonder if he has anything to tell us. We were just talking of you, Sir Jesse, and reckoning how soon you would run your highwayman down. I am sure you have the genius of a minister of police."

"Even they are at fault sometimes, Miss Brassingham. I regret to say I have discovered nothing yet. Oh, Carroll, I am glad to see you here. It looks as if that report I heard were not true."

Hartley made a desperate effort to laugh. "Which of the hundred and one reports do you mean, that are let fly one day and called in the next?"

"I only alluded to that-" The rest was inaudible to all but

Hartley himself, who shrugged his shoulders and smiled; speaking

soon after to Alice apart.

"You missed a grand opportunity just then: the Adversary in the famous piece of the 'Chess-player' must have been modelled from some belonging of Strahan's. Bruce has the good angel at his elbow—that is a point on his side. So you really start to-morrow?"

"Really. Have you any commission?"

"Yes. Tell them both to make the most of their happiness, and to come back as soon as they conveniently can. I don't mind telling you in confidence, Tiny misses her sister; and when the weather grows sultry, I should like her to go down to Lowlevels. What has

become of the Ironhand, do you know?"

"I had a formal little note from him in answer to mine, beginning, 'Erasmus Martin respectfully thanks Miss Kerr for the honour of her letter,' and going on to say he was on the point of returning to London with the Reverend Mr. Forrest, to inquire, among other things, after Grace Pyne, who had left them without any explanation, and was last seen in our train. Nothing will ever make me believe that Grace had a hand in the robbery—nothing."

"What is the programme for to-night?"

"Oh, have you not arranged to go with us? Clare said you would take us to see that new piece at the Triumph Theatre, which every-

body is talking about. You will, won't you?"

"I can refuse you nothing. To be talked about by everybody, is to be too attractive for me to resist. There is Tiny looking nearly as fast asleep as Miss Thirza. We must get her out of all this as fast as we can."

It was a real success, that fairy piece at the little striving Triumph; the manager had been happy enough to discover a rising dramatist, with a freshness of thought and vivacity of style as yet unhackneyed by constant work, and with a gift of graceful verse, principally humorous, but varied here and there by a pathetic touch which went straight to the hearts of those who had laughed a minute before. The satire was good-natured, the sentiments were generous, the framework of the story was well suited to the appliances of the stage, and the parts, being written expressly for the Triumph company, had the rare fortune of pleasing them. From the first representation of the Fairy Bubbles it had been evident that a "hit" had been made at last; the great object now was to get as much profit out of it as possible, and this could only be satisfactorily done by having numerous performances. Not only did it run night after night, but morning representations for children were also in great favour; and it would have been hard to say, sometimes, which scene looked the more attractive, the stage or the audience. Truly, never did fairies meet with such sweet believers to gaze at and admire them as the children, whose musical laughter ran round the house, with the

accompaniment of clapping hands that might have been the cymbals of Titania's court. From beginning to end these gazers believed in it all—in the long-bearded philosopher, who made such a droll speech while preparing the soap and water for blowing bubbles, he having exhausted every other occupation; in the fairy Saponia herself, who came in behind his chair, and touched the soapsuds with her wand; and above all, in the bubbles when they came rising out of the darkness, growing larger and brighter, and more full of rainbow tints, till each slowly opened, and a fairy came out all silver and dazzling colours, making one of a group that performed all sorts of pleasant tricks on the rest of the personages-showing the Prince how to find the talisman, and helping the Princess to put the tyrant to sleep while they whisked away with all his treasure. Wonderful fairies they, with each her own particular bubble, into which she skipped when danger appeared, and floated away nobody knows where; and wonderful too were the verses they spoke, in which, with plenty of satire on the whims and speculations of the day, was mingled such an archness of wit and smartness of repartee that the lines were caught up and remembered, to be the joy of many a private performance for many

a day to come.

What a life it was, thought the children, to be dressed in that starry, silvery stuff, that looked like anything but stupid clothes-to have wings on your shoulders, and stars on your forehead, and to run in and out among those bewitching lights, and float through that mysterious red fire, and have everybody clapping and admiring Happy, beautiful fairies! How they envied the princess's clever favourite, who was on such intimate terms with the fairy queen, and, like Morgiana in the Forty Thieves, was more than a match for any number of villains, in jars or out of them. Her acting really was good, and she had a drolly serious way of uttering her puns, as if they took her so much by surprise that she had to stop and think about them, which fairly carried old and young by storm. Again and again had she to pause and curtsey in acknowledgment of the applause; and if her royal mistress, who clung to her so trustingly, could but have had her own way, it is to be feared the favourite slave would then and there have been made to feel the danger of popularity. Many a black look and sharp word had already passed between them behind the scenes, before that happened which for a time made even Envy dumb. There was one special fairy in whom the audience took peculiar pleasure, so genuine was the comedy in her gestures and by-play. Between her and the favourite there was always a happy understanding; and a popular colloquy, in which they argued about the respective merits of their mistresses, never failed to win an encore. On one of these occasions—it was during a morning performance before a crowded house—the encore was not immediately responded to, and even while the applause was growing louder and more urgent, the favourite, contrary to her cue, began to

hurry her companion towards the side scene. It was thought at first to be a fit of obstinacy, and all the young gentlemen in pit and gallery waxed more uproarious in consequence; but the uproar was soon checked by the fall of the curtain, cutting short the unfinished act. The manager came forward to be speak the indulgence of the public—one of their young ladies having been taken ill, a substitute would be found and the piece resumed as soon as possible; and he was sure that every allowance would be kindly made by so considerate an audience.

The audience responded, as of course such an audience would, and all passed off quietly; many tender little hearts being sorely divided between the amusement of the rest of the play, and their pity for the poor fairy who could not enjoy it too. It was only the elders who detected in the acting and voice of the popular favourite the excitement of an agitation which made her comedy almost melodramatic—so fierce were some of her gestures, so rapid at times did

her utterance become.

The evening papers announced with regret that Mademoiselle Honora Salviati, one of the most talented artistes of the company, had unfortunately broken a blood-vessel during the performance, and was lying in a perilous state at the nearest hospital. No blame could be attached to the management, and every attention was being shown by the medical authorities. Her place was already filled up, and the Bubbles would go on till further notice, as if nothing had

happened.

Two or three days had passed, and Mr. Harper was passing through one of the wards under his care, when he heard a weak voice, which had been forbidden all exertion, whispering a piteous "Doctor, dear." With a kind word of caution he turned to the bed whence the voice proceeded, and took his seat beside it, with his hand on Honor's fluttering pulse. He saw she had something she wished to say, and that it would be nearly as dangerous in her state to check her entirely as to allow her to speak. Her hollow eyes fastened on his with a feverish earnestness, in which was no delirium; it was the pressure of a maddening thought that would not let her rest, and wrung from her lips that mournful appeal for sympathy.

"Docther, dear"- her accent grew more national as her eagerness

to speak increased-" is it dying I am?"

"I cannot tell you, my poor girl; I hope for the best, if you will do as you are told, and keep quiet. I have obtained leave for your sister to come to you to-morrow, so you will enjoy your Sunday if you are good now."

"I daren't tell Caterina. She is breaking her heart over me as it is; but if I say to her what I want to say, she will be right mad. Docther, you'll never let her know I told you, will you, now?"

He promised, and kindly bent down that she might whisper in his ear.

His face grew very serious as he listened: only his professional self-command kept him silent. When she paused, he soothed her with kind promises and assurances of secrecy; and then hastened to despatch the rest of his duty as quickly as his conscience would allow.

A cab was at the door of the hospital as he came out. He sprang in, with a hasty order. "Drive to St. Edmund's Mission House, and be as quick about it as you can!"

(To be continued.)



LIFE AND DEATH.

"What is Life, father?" "A battle, my child, Where the strongest lance may fail, Where the wariest eyes may be beguiled, And the stoutest heart may quail. Where the foes are gathered on every hand, And rest not, day nor night, And the feeble little ones must stand In the thickest of the fight."

"What is Death, father?" "The rest, my child, When the strife and toil are o'er; The Angel of God, who, calm and mild, Says we need fight no more: Who driveth away the demon band, Bids the din of battle cease; Takes the banner and spear from the failing hand, And proclaims an eternal peace."

"Let me die, father! I tremble and fear
To yield in that terrible strife."

"The crown must be won for heaven, dear,
In the battle-field of Life.

My child, tho' thy foes are strong and tried,
He loveth the weak and small;
The Angels of Heaven are on thy side,
And God is over all."

SUNDAY OUT.

AM conscious that in expressing the opinion that a Sunday out is one of the most aggravating minor evils with which Providence afflicts the human race I am running entirely counter to one of the accepted traditions of the English people. The authority of the gifted author of "Sally in our Alley" may be quoted against me, and Mr. Hood's verdict will be supported by innumerable namesakes of the heroine of that poem. Let me therefore premise that I am not writing this sketch from the domestic servant's point of view, but as the representative of a far humbler portion of society-viz., of those young briefless barristers, Government clerks, somethings in the City at nothing per annum, whose main use in life appears to me to be to point morals, to be reviled by the Daily Telegraph for not marrying on £300 a year, and to be described by the writers of social sketches in the weekly papers as useless encumbrances to the In the name of these, my much-enduring colleagues, I take up my parable and denounce Sundays out.

Like many of my class I am blessed with numerous relatives and friends possessing small places within fifty miles of London, who are most diligent in their kind invitations to me to "come down for a Sunday." I am, I am thankful to say, gifted with excellent health, and can support even the toil of a Government office through the week without absolutely breaking down on the Saturday. But to judge from the anxiety of some of my kind friends that I should come and get a little fresh air, the labour must tell upon me more than I myself perceive, and the remedy, habitually prescribed for

my complaint is, a Sunday in the country.

Now, Fate has willed it that the vast majority of my hosts either live on branch lines of railway, necessitating one or more changes of carriage to arrive at one's destination, or else at a spot attainable by several lines of railway—to counterbalance which advantage no line has a convenient dinner or morning train; whilst my few friends who are in neither of these predicaments select their domiciles about four miles from the station, and don't send to meet me.

I will then ask the reader kindly to accompany me mentally, and

go down to A. Hall with me from Saturday to Monday.

After the delightful process has been accomplished of ascertaining from which of the Waterloo platforms my train starts, I immerse myself in the study of the evening paper, in the perusal of which I am seriously interrupted by two lady fellow-travellers—one of whom wants the window (my window) a little up, whilst the other desires it to be totally down. The consequence is that I pass a mauvais quart d'heure between the harrowing spectacle of one fair dame

shivering ostentatiously, and another parading a show of suffocation. Conversation, I need not add, there is none. Am I not one of those wolves in sheep's clothing, a young man, and, as such, out of

the pale of travelling humanity?

So I am thankful when Crupley Junction is reached, and am resigned to even twenty minutes' wait in that delightful station as a preliminary to fifteen minutes' agony in a filthy smoking-carriage. But even a South-Western journey comes at last to an end, and I arrive at the little platform of Heire. How joyfully do I descend and summon the hobbledehoy who is charged with the regulation of the traffic at this important point.

"Porter," I remark, handing him my valise, "I suppose there's a

trap to meet me from A. Hall?"

The porter disappears through the door, and I suddenly become conscious that if any vehicle were in attendance it would be plainly visible from where I stand. Hang it! Uncle B. can't have made any mistake—he told me this was the best train to come by, and he said he'd send to meet it. But the porter returns and confirms the melancholy fact that Mr. B. has not sent. He looks so sympathetic as he says this that I feel the presentation of sixpence is incumbent on me. This satisfies him, but does not otherwise advance matters. Now, what's to be done? The porter, whose interest in me has already flagged, doesn't know. No more do I. I consequently sit down and wait half an hour on the chance of something turning up, but with as little success as Mr. Micawber. It is needless to say that at Heire station flys are unknown, and it seems to me that the porter is getting sulky at my protracted stay in the At length it becomes clear that I must quit, and as Velveteens holds out no hope of being able to send my valise up to A. Hall in time for dinner I must e'en carry it myself. I proceed to the task-a walk of two miles on a hot evening. Not even a friendly boy is to be obtained until within a quarter of a mile of the house, when two urchins almost tear my valise from me and insist upon receiving a shilling a piece remuneration. ascertain, subsequently, that my hostess did send to meet me, but to another station some mile and a half further from the Hall and to which there was no earthly reason I should go.

But Mrs. B. had some shopping to do at Rumshall, and with true feminine logic thought her guest might by some intuition discern this fact and shape his route accordingly. I merely mention this en passant to explain why I found it necessary to bestow five shillings on the groom when he returned some hours later to the Hall, having

waited for the last train from town.

But to resume. Mr. B. greets me with effusion. "Charley, my dear boy, I'm so glad to see you! How are all your people?—quite well—that's right. So glad you were able to come to us—we don't make a stranger of you, you know—there's no party here—but

the boys are all at home for an exeat-and I daresay you'll manage to

amuse yourself."

My prospect of enjoyment becomes even fainter. If there is one thing I abominate more than another it is a gang of schoolboys at home for a holiday. I am not a misanthrope; but does any man derive amusement from being consigned to the mercies of "the boys"—having to carry the wretches' stumps to the cricket-field, mark out the ground for them, and be privileged to bowl or longstop for them throughout the afternoon? Or, if they are aquatic, where's the fun of lugging twenty stones' weight of boys three miles against a strong stream, down which the youngsters have so gleefully floated?

Then is it appetising for a man, accustomed to dine at his club like a Christian, to be stuck down—perhaps to carve—before a bullock roasted whole—and a mass of jam and suet—the eternal

food of the rising generation?

Such is the prospect which, not for the first time, displays itself to my melancholy contemplation. But my host interrupts my reflections. "Well, Charley, you know your room—don't you?" Oh yes, I should think I did know my room. Top of the house—broken bell-pull, and munificently stocked with all the invalided pieces of furniture in the mansion—smoking strictly prohibited, an exception being only made in winter in favour of the chimney. Thither, however, do I proceed, and array myself in evening garb. In the drawing-room I find Mrs. B. and a lady who reminds me of boiled gooseberry pudding. "Charley, let me present you to Fräulein Donner und Blitzen." Then aside to me, "She's Fanny and Mary's new governess—a very superior person."

Now, I do hate a superior person—especially when she's a German. If she'd only have been inferior and a Briton! Crash goes the door, and in rush the three B. boys, yelling as if a dinner was a novelty to them, and they were about to taste food for the first time. "Holloa! here's Cousin Charley,"—and I am set upon and pulled by these little brats with as little compunction as if I were a bag of

cotton.

The announcement of dinner saves me from the double task of repelling these young demons and carrying on a scientific conversation in German with Fräulein Donner. I offer my arm to Aunt Jane with a real momentary feeling of affection, and escort her to that cheerless apartment—adorned with imaginary portraits of ancestors suffering pangs of indigestion in tight-fitting suits of armour—which modern society calls the dining-room.

Over the details of the repast I need not linger. All of my genus have undergone similar feasts, and have tasted the specialité port Uncles John produce when their olive branches are at home for the holidays. I am placed between Mrs. B. and the Fräulein. The former cross questions me as to how all the members of my family are, and opines that they all "look pale." As I am totally unable

to affirm or deny this proposition, she abandons me as a bad job; and I fall from Scylla into Charybdis—viz., into the jaws of the Fräulein, who wants me to explain in the Teutonic tongue the difference between Free Trade and Protection. I learn afterwards that she meditates inditing a letter to the Kölnische Zeitung, which shall effectually demolish the heresies of Herr Camphausen. I inwardly hope the K. Z. will not publish her lucubration, or Richard Cobden will rise from his grave to protest against the economical doctrines my limited knowledge of her lingo has compelled me to expound.

Matters don't mend after dinner. Uncle John wants to know what I think of the state of affairs in the East. Now, it's quite true I'm a Foreign Office clerk, but is it my business to think? I mean about foreign affairs, of course. Theatricals, balls, social scandals, it is my duty to be up in. But foreign politics! Why, what is Lord Derby paid for? I can't get my host to see this. So the after dinner séance comes to a brief termination, and we adjourn to the

drawing-room.

As Mr. and Mrs. B. "don't make a stranger of me," the normal evening occupations of A. Hall are in full swing. Aunt Jane is working-knitting, tatting, crocheting, or some such inexplicable mystery. The gifted Teuton is giving us a "little"—a very little -music, in which the harmony achieved bears a very scanty proportion to the amount of elbow labour employed. Mr. B. goes to sleep, and I re-peruse last week's Illustrated London News. The boys sit round the inevitable circular table in the centre of the room, and kick each other's shins; but I regard their freaks with a tolerant eye, for I can see it riles my enemy the Fräulein. She is equal to the occasion, however, and takes a base revenge by inviting them to sing a hymn. Oh, heavens! Tom, Dick, and Harry sing a hymn! I gaze appealingly at her, but apparently only rouse her bile, for she inquires of my aunt if Herr Karl sings? However, his sons' performance does arouse Uncle John, who packs the artists off to bed peremptorily, and leads the rest of the party in funereal procession off to family prayers. The assembled retainers, unlike their master and mistress, do make a stranger of me, and criticise my apparel with such scornful glances as entirely distract my mind from the beauties of the Hebraic genealogies over which Uncle John is stumbling. Devotions ended, bed is the word. Bed at 10 P.M. !for me, whose usual hour of retiring varies from I to 2 A.M. at the earliest. I can't go out and smoke, for fear of the big dog they always loose outside, whose kennel is at present lined with an Inverness cape, torn in earlier years from my shoulders, when I ventured out one inauspicious night; so I take up with a sigh "Paley's Evidences of Christianity," thinking what a living example I am of the doctrine of Christian endurance, and adjourn with this light work to my apartment. But to be just, I admit its perusal procures me three hours' extra sleep, for by II P.M. I am fast in the land of Nod.

Sunday, 7 A.M.—Rap, rap, rap, breaks feebly on my drowsy ear. "What the --- " I mutter, slowly arousing myself, "is the matter? What's Mrs. C. (my excellent landlady in town) up to, calling me at this unholy hour?" It is some minutes before the truth breaks upon me—that I am at A. Hall, and that my uncle breakfasts at eight, Heaven only knows why. He has a craze, too, against hot water, and I can't shave with cold—and his servants never can black boots properly. However, I get up, and splash into the tub. Like everything else here, it is new-fangled—a new invention, that makes it easy for the housemaid to empty into the slop-pail, but equally facile for its tenant to distribute over the carpet. So, at least, I find it; and it is only a modified consolation to me, viewing the lake on the floor, to hear a very audible "Ach Himmel" from the floor below, and to ascertain that Fräulein Donner und Blitzen is undergoing a visit from Jupiter Pluvius. Well, at all events she'll understand the commercial term "flooding the market" now. As the bell-pull is broken I can't summon assistance, and am compelled to devote all the towels to repairing damages, and descend to breakfast in no

very amiable state of mind.

Country air gives one an appetite, and I welcome Uncle John's time-honoured joke that this house will now go into Committee of Supply with such hearty applause as merits a more ample—I had well-nigh made a pun and said liberal-return than I receive. An infinitesimal scrap of bacon, supplemented by an egg, is not sufficient for my requirements. The postman has conscientious scruples about delivering letters on Sunday, and as he is a "character," the residents don't make him deliver them. It appears to me that the only salient feature in his disposition is a disinclination to do his work. I could be as good a "character" as that. I mutter something to this effect, and am reproved by the Fräulein, who says, "Ach der arme mann." She doesn't see any harm in Bill Stokes loafing about the village and smoking his short pipe instead of delivering the letters; so why should she look at me reproachfully after breakfast, when I produce my cigar-case, and say, "Will Herr Karl nun rauchen?" I am getting angry, so I answer, "Ja I will," and I do. I have an hour's peace and tobacco before my three small cousins, looking as wretched as boys do in their go-to-meeting clothes, come to lug me off to church. It is getting insufferably hot for a two-mile walk, and it is rather aggravating to be told, "Well, Charles, you've young legs, and will look after the boys," and to see Mr. and Mrs. B., the gouvernante, and Fanny and Mary preparing to stow themselves away in a comfortable landau. Long before we've gone half way Tom has torn his jacket, scrambling over a hedge to avoid going through a gate; Dick has cut his finger, showing off his new knife; and Harry has tumbled into a ditch and muddied his trousers. What a rage Aunt Tane will be in!

Repairing damages causes us to be ten minutes late at the church,

and the clergyman, I feel, excludes the intruders from the benefits of the absolution he is pronouncing. The boys are summoned into the family pew, and I am consigned to the charge of the clergyman's elderly maiden sister, who will ostentatiously hand me hymn-books, though she knows, or at least soon finds out, that I can't sing. The clergyman gives us forty minutes without a check, on the distinction between the churches of Sardis and Thyatira, as an appropriate sermon for agricultural labourers' minds. When service is over, Mr. and Mrs. B. don't say anything to me, but the three dishevelled boys are stowed away in the carriage, and Mrs. B. looks at the knees of Harry's trousers, and then at her nephew, in a way that reduces my height by two feet at least. Under the circumstances the Fräulein has to walk home, and I—I have to escort her.

On Sunday the inhabitants of A. Hall dine early; why, I know not, unless to complete the misery of the day. Friends who have been stuck down before a steaming round of beef at 2 P.M. on a summer afternoon can imagine my sensations during the next two hours. The boys are in disgrace, and are not allowed to have pudding. I also am in disgrace, and am compelled to take some: hot plum-pudding-heavy suet, with plums rari nantes therein. Such is the reward of evil-doers. A walk is the next recreation held out to me; a compulsory promenade, to which the treadmill is a joke. I can tolerate turnips and patronise ploughs when foxes or partridges form a component part of the rural scene; but to walk with a relative in a tall hat and demeanour to correspond—to be accompanied by three small boys—to look for the tenth time at an aggravated molehill, and to be told it was the much-maligned Cæsar's camp—these are the sort of provocations which make one feel that a promenade in the country constitutes extenuating circumstances in the most aggravated case of uncle-slaughter.

Hot, head-achey, and heart-sick, I return to the culminating outrage that is in store for me at A. Hall. Gentle reader, need I say that I allude to a meat tea. The details of my sufferings hitherto, over which you have kindly cast a sympathising eye, have, I am conscious, been already too prolonged for me to have the right or the barbarity to dilate on this topic. Yet what does a meat tea mean? Pie-always pie-muffins and marmalade piled one after another on one small china plate. The domestics disapprove of much washing or tidying up on Sunday evening, so napkins are abjured, and the supply of knives and forks reduced to a minimum. No bad precaution, by the way, in Fräulein Donner's case, who applies her one blade in the usual Teutonic fashion to her mouth. The lower end of the table is taken up with an enormous tray full of teacups and a vast urn, which reduce the space of tablecloth allotted to my plate (I am sitting next Mrs. B.) to four inches. Conversation is difficult; the children are only supposed to talk on serious subjects, their inability to do which necessitates communication being carried on

by means of kicks under the table, several of which fall on my unaccustomed legs. I ask Aunt Jane if she has been at the Grosvenor Gallery, and she responds with as much horror as if I had specified the Argyll Rooms. Fräulein asks me if I have read Herr Dummkopf's "Principles of Cosmogony"—that doesn't lead to conversation. She says she'll lend it me though, which is a fresh damper

on my spirits.

Tea ended, we adjourn to the drawing-room, and, heedless of black or rather religiously grey looks, I take up a newspaper-an old one it's true, but I can study the advertisements till bed-time. But my tormentor has a card in reserve. Will Herr B. so gut sein als etwas zu lesen? Here's the last straw. Uncle John's going to read an improving book aloud. Yes, by Jove, he is! Can I keep awake? Poppies are nothing to Uncle John's reading. Well, I shall soon know-that's one comfort. He takes down a dingy brown book, and begins to read about the sufferings of the early Christians. am sure they were a joke to those of the present generation. recorded," reads Mr. B., "of St. Scarificatus, that the excessive tortures to which he was subjected, in consequence of his conversion to Christianity, by members even of his own family, were so protracted and refined as ultimately to produce a state of coma, during which the holy man became perfectly insensible to the exquisite torments to which he was exposed."

"I am sorry you were so very fatigued, Charley, with your walk, as to be unable to listen to the interesting account of St. Scarificatus which your uncle has been reading to us," says Aunt Jane, severely. "I am afraid your late hours in town are too much for your strength," and I suddenly become painfully conscious that I have missed hearing the finale of the early Christians' wars. I feel Mrs. B. has the better of me, and I shamble off to bed without attempting a vindication. Of course my drawing-room nap has spoiled my night's rest, and I have the pleasure of lying awake till 2 A.M., with the further knowledge that I am to be aroused at seven. For Mr. B. goes up to town by an 8.30 train, and cherishes an invincible delu-

sion that it is essential for me to be equally matutinal.

The programme is carried out to the letter. I am aroused at seven, and do dress somehow, with tepid shaving water and other désagrémens. Breakfast is of course a scramble—or would be, if there were not a deficiency of viands to scramble for—and finally Uncle John announces his intention of going to the station by the short cut, a mile and a half over fields, impassable to wheels. "I suppose, Charley, my boy, you can carry your bag that far." The deuce he does. I ask him if he can't send it up in the course of the day, but he knows a trick worth two of that, and says he won't be sending in till Thursday. He is aware that I can't dispense with a tooth-brush till then, so he has me on the hip, and I have my valise on my shoulder. What a weight the simplest bit of solid leather is.

We just catch the train after a quarter of a mile's run: I purchase the daily paper with a sigh of intense thankfulness, and devote myself behind its columns to striking a balance between the pros. and cons. of a visit to A. Hall. The result of my calculation is roughly summarised in the annexed table:

Pros.	£	s.	d.	Cons. £ s.	đ.
Benefit derived from fresh air (doubtful) Value of food, say Benefits derived from improving conversation (very doubtful) Total Ascertained Balance in favour of Cons £1				Railway ticket o 7 1	10
				Porter o o	6
	0	10	0		0
				Offertory in church o I	0
				Fees to servants o 10	0
				Cabs in London o 3	6
	0	10	0	Aggravation caused by pe- culiarities of relation (doubtful, but extensive) Aggravation caused by Fräulein Donner 100 o	0
	00	14	10	Total 101 4 1	0

I feel that, as a business man, my visit must not be repeated, and for the tenth time I register a vow it shall not. London reached, I take a cordial farewell of my uncle, spring into a cab, and proceed to my lodgings, there to set out on paper to you, gentle reader, the woes attendant on a Sunday Out.

FLEXIBILIS INCERTUS.

P.S.—I reopen this to say that I missed sending the packet to the printer last week, and that I have just received the following note:—

"Dear Charley,—I hope you will be able to come down to us again for next Saturday to Monday. We shall have no party, but I daresay you'll enjoy a quiet Sunday with us. Fräulein Donner desires kind remembrances. "Your affectionate aunt,

" JANE B."

Now, what am I to do? I suppose I must accept: or will "Vanity Fair" take mine up as a hard case, and solicit the opinions of its numerous readers on my position?

PASSAGES FROM THE LIFE OF A MATRON IN OLDEN TIMES.

(From the German.)

"A HUFRAU" (vaguely, ancestress) is the name by which in some parts of Suabia a grandmother, or great-grandmother, is designated, and under this title I would fain introduce an ancestress of my own, whose living image is still fresh in my memory.

Seldom has a whole lifetime been spent within so limited a space. From her first year of life, until her eighty-fourth, the same quiet little town had been the scene of her joys and sorrows: of her whole life-work. She had but seldom quitted the spot, and then only to make short visits to her family or her children. Yet how many different pictures were enframed within the limits of those city walls! What a fresh, warm-hearted disposition! What never-fading heart-flowers she contrived to keep in bloom on a soil one would have thought it scarcely possible to grow even the commonest of plants!

The Ahufrau, who, when I first knew her, was a little shrivelled-up old woman, had once been young and pretty, and she was nothing loth to have this known, more especially as the portrait of her in her youth, which still existed, was unhappily no masterpiece, and gave but a very inadequate impression of her early charms. And yet even in this picture—poor and badly-executed as it was—the clear blue eyes, and the rose placed in the blonde powdered locks, had so pleasing an effect that a countryman had once asked in admiration:

"But who, then, is this pretty young girl?"

"That was once myself, Jacob!"

"Yourself? Well, to be sure! how we do change."

And the good old Ahufrau had quite enjoyed this not very flattering remark—for though she was still a little vain (as who is not?) she was most of all vain of those vanished days, in which, indeed, she seemed to live and move to the very last.

The Ahufrau had married early, as was often the case in those days. But however young she may have been when she spoke that memorable "Yes," upon which her whole life had followed as a full and glad "Amen," she was not so young but that her heart had already experienced some little agitations of its own. I will leave her to relate for herself the sad and touching story of these first gentle heart-yearnings—if I can but remember it in her own words.

"You must know that I had a very happy childhood, although there were ten of us, brothers and sisters, and we had to do a great deal for ourselves; for my father was not rich, though his position was good, and we knew nothing of want or care. It is difficult to realise the important position of a civil functionary in those days. particularly when he was like my father, who was always called upon to attend the Duke whenever he came to Stuttgart. Ah, yes, we were thought much of: even I myself held my head somewhat high, and little dreamed that here, in Nürtingen, under my father's juris-

diction, his son-in-law was also growing up!

"Well, it happened not unfrequently that learned and distinguished men came to my father's house, and we were quite accustomed to such visitors. But there was one who came sometimes-not oftenwhose coming made my heart beat as it had never done in my life before. And it happened, oddly enough, that whenever he came, whether walking or on horseback, I always chanced to be at the window and to see him. Every time he would look up and greet me: no matter whether I were in the kitchen, or at the latticewindow, or in the parlour, he always looked in the right place. whenever he came to dine with us, I was always the last to join the party, for on those days I would take extra pains to dress becomingly,

though all the while I was ashamed of myself for doing so.

"I only saw him at dinner-time, and I should just like to have seen my father if one of us had dared to speak at table unless first spoken to! But every now and then he would address his conversation to me, and then I blushed so much and felt so confused that I could hardly answer him. Besides, I never supposed that so handsome and distinguished a man would give so much as a thought to It was even reported that the Duke was about to attach him to his embassy. Only once I did think it-just a very little. He had been with my father, and was returning alone across the courtyard, just as I, mounted on the steps, was watering my plants. Even from that distance I saw that he was coming towards me, but I did not stir an inch, and went on plucking at a single roseleaf. But how I started when I heard his voice below me. 'What lovely rosebuds, Miss Caroline!'

"I did not know what to answer; scarcely even looked at him.

"'Is there not just one among them for me?' he continued. And, quick as thought, before I could recollect myself, I had cut off the loveliest of them all. But then I dared not give it to him; until at last he himself drew it gently from my hand, and saying with a smile, 'Thank you very, very much!' he went hurriedly away.

"What happened all the rest of that day I do not know. I believe I got a severe scolding from my mother for being dreamy, and it was

as though a peal of bells were ringing in my ears.

"Next morning he rode over from 'The Swan.' The rosebud had opened during the night, and he had placed it in his button-hole.

"For many nights after that I could not sleep, and was terribly

frightened lest any of my elder sisters should notice it.

"About a fortnight afterwards my father was away from home," and we had a grand house-cleaning. The whole house was turned inside out; drawers and cupboards were emptied, and we were all out of doors with trustles and dust-cloths, scrubbing and polishing wardrobes, tables, and presses, and in great awe of the mother, who on these days was always in ill-humour and easily provoked.

"In the midst of it all came Bastel, the old town-carrier, and went past me up the staircase, asking, 'Where shall I find your mother? Here is a letter to the master; but it is a private one—not official.'

"' Upstairs, in the spare bedroom.'

"Bastel went up, and none of us asked about the letter.

"My father stayed away much longer than he had expected. He had been at home a couple of days, when one day, at dinner-time, he observed to my mother, 'Only think, Nanny: S. has arrived at the Austrian Embassy, and he has never so much as taken leave of us, either in writing or by word of mouth! Just the way with these distinguished men; but I should never have expected it of him.'

"My mother expressed her surprise, and my sisters too put in their word. As for me, I could not swallow another morsel, and that night I wept bitterly. Of course I had never really supposed that he would think again of me—but still, for all that, I was strangely hurt. After that no one mentioned him again, and I grew to think

I must have been a very silly girl.

"Just then my now sainted husband, who had for some time back been my father's assistant, obtained the office of Recorder: no small thing, considering his youth. He came at once to my father and asked my hand. My father called me into his room, and solemnly opened the subject to me. 'You are at liberty to choose for yourself, Caroline,' he concluded; 'but I shall expect you to act reasonably, and accept the offer of this sensible and upright man.' So I saw how much free choice I should have in the matter, and that I dare

not refuse. But still I could not bring myself to say 'Yes!'

"You see, though I had always had the greatest respect for him; he was a fine, stately-looking man, earnest and steady beyond his years, and very highly esteemed by my father; yet it had never occurred to me that he should ever be my husband, and now I felt as though it really could not be! But my father thought this was only pride in me because his parents were poor, and he spoke his mind to me about it very warmly: 'If you had even one sensible reason why you should refuse him I would not say another word.' But I had no sensible reason to give—only a very foolish one—so then I said, 'Yes,' in God's name, and prayed that He would make me to say it with a willing heart. And He did so; and I was very happy when I saw how everyone rejoiced, and how much my parents honoured my future husband, and me with him, so that now I might even talk at table just as freely as the mother herself. He did his utmost to prove his love for me, and to make me happy. But once, though with the best intention in the world, he signally failed and provoked me very much.

"A new residence had been assigned him—that fine large house which you know so well—and he was occupying it temporarily in order to get it furnished. Now I had long promised him that my mother and I would call upon him there, and we fixed our visit for a certain day. So mother and I set off together, across the market-place, I keeping on the inside, close up to the houses, for I was feeling very conscious. But, lo! all at once every window of the new house was thrown open, and the town trumpeter and all his band, with trumpets, clarionets, and drums, began to play the newest 'Ecossaise!'

"You may imagine how speedily all the neighbouring windows flew open. All heads peered out, and the street children came running together: everybody asking, 'What's the matter? What

has happened?'

"'Oh, it is only our new Recorder welcoming his fiancée!'

"How I wished I could have sunk into the ground! He meant it well, and thought to do me a great honour—but it was a long time

before I could get over it.

"However, that was all past and gone, and we were happy and satisfied with each other, when one day my uncle, the county judge, announced his intention of paying us a visit. Now, his visits were always most important events—ducks and chickens were killed, trout were caught, and in the best bedroom new curtains were put up, and the silk counterpane thrown over the bed. My father, who never at any other time troubled himself about household matters, actually went upstairs with me himself to see that all was right. I was just taking out from the wardrobe the real china service for the wash-hand-stand, which was never put out except on these great occasions, and then only with fear and trembling—for from our very childhood we had been accustomed to hear of its almost fabulous worth—when I suddenly exclaimed in surprise:

"'Why, father, here is a sealed letter for you!' And all at once there flashed upon me the recollection of the letter Bastel had brought on the day of the house-cleaning. I trembled to think of the storm this carelessness on the mother's part would be certain to arouse.

"My father hastily tore open the letter and began to read it; but as he read his countenance grew more grave and troubled.

"'This has come too late!' he said, slowly; and after a moment's hesitation he handed me the letter. 'There, read it, Caroline! it concerns you most!' And then, with long strides, he paced up and down the room. I began to read the letter, my heart beating fast with surprise and fear. But all at once it seemed to stand quite still: for what do you think were the contents of the letter? A formal offer for my hand from S. to my father: and enclosed lay a little note for me, so sweet and tender I can say it all even now by heart.

"Everything seemed to swim before my eyes, and conscious only of a longing to be alone, I hurried downstairs into the little dressingroom below. What did I do? I prayed—not without bitter tears, it is true, but still I prayed to Him who stilled the tempest on the

sea: and soon in my heart also 'there was a great calm.'

"When about an hour had passed my father once more called me to him. Now, I have always wondered since that he should ever have shown me that letter, or have said a word to me on the subject, seeing that I was already an affianced bride; but this proves how very deeply he must have felt it. I found him looking extremely pale and very much distressed.

"'Caroline,' he said, 'this is very grievous; God knows it pains me deeply that it should have occurred—that my promise——'

"'Do not let us speak any further of it, father,' I answered quietly. 'If God's will had been so, He could have ordered it otherwise. I did indeed at one time think how glad I should be to have such a husband; one whom I could have loved with my whole heart and soul; but now I wish to love Frederic, and God will enable me to do so.'

"'You are a brave girl, Caroline! God will order all things well for you!' and for the first time he held out his hand to me.

"His words were fulfilled: God did order all things well for us, and blessed us richly in heart and home, and eight strong children are

now the comfort and joy of my old age.

"Whether my father ever wrote to S. I cannot tell, but for me, as an affianced bride, it would not have been fitting. Certainly I was much grieved that he should have thought himself thus scornfully rejected, and so have quitted us in anger. But I think he must have been a very proud man, or he never could have parted from us thus.

"Frederic was, as my father had said, an honest, upright man, and my best friend in all the world—one who loved and esteemed me all his life long. But you would be mistaken were you to suppose that just because at first he thought me so precious, and treated me like a princess, he was an unusually submissive husband. No-nohe was thoroughly the master and head of the house, and I was always obedient and submissive to him, as a right-minded wife should be. I would not say this of myself if he had not himself borne witness to it on his death-bed. But I never told him this story of S. and the letter until both he and I could feel quite certain that I no longer regretted the mishap. The unreserved confidence of married life is a very beautiful thing, and a true-hearted wife will have no secrets from her husband-only one must not plunge into this too hastily, or you may easily plant a thorn in your husband's heart such as it is afterwards very difficult to remove."

Now, if anyone, on hearing this story of the Ahufrau's early love, should picture her to himself henceforth like a harp with broken strings which can only give out one doleful sound, or like a weeping willow, bending continually over the grave of her departed dreams—

such an one would be very much mistaken. She did not endure life, but encountered it with fresh vigour, and fought on its battle-field cheerfully and well. And that she was not of a sentimental nature may be inferred from the fact that the first trouble of her married life was—the discovery that her youthful husband could not dance!

It was among the simple customs of those good old times that all important events of life, such as marriages, baptisms, etc., should be celebrated with correspondingly important festivities. Accordingly, the Ahufrau's marriage was solemnised with all due ceremony. All her friends, kindred, and acquaintance—even to the entire staff of her father's clerks—were invited to the wedding breakfast; all the servants, laundry-maids, and day-labourers at the house, including even former servants, with their parents, brothers, and sisters, were assembled to enjoy the warmth of the luxurious kitchen-fire and the

bountiful repast it had helped to prepare.

"But in the evening," as the Ahufrau was wont to relate, "by ill-luck came the wedding-ball. For some time back there had been no dancing parties given at which I and my intended husband had been present together. Well, as soon as the music began, I stood up with my newly-married husband to lead the first minuet. But just when we ought to have begun, there was he only tripping about, like this, with his feet! 'Well, why don't you begin?' I said. 'I am very sorry,' he answered, laughing, 'but I have never yet succeeded in learning how to dance!' But it was no laughing matter to me. I felt quite ashamed that all my guests should see that I had a husband who could not dance, and I thought it was very unfair of him not to have told me so before."

Nevertheless, our worthy Ahufrau never found much time for dancing, however fond of it she may have been as a bride of sixteen years. Almost before she had reached her twentieth year three little children were playing round her knees; so her husband had at any rate no cause to envy her the delight in dancing which he could not share.

"I should not recommend such early marriages," she would say, "although it answered well enough with us. I was still a mere child, and had to buy my experience very dearly. But I was strong and healthy—and, thank God, I am so still. When the warden's wife came to see me soon after the birth of my first child, and crept quietly into my bedroom, to her astonishment she found the bed empty, and no young mother to be seen. 'But where can she be?' she inquired of the nurse in surprise and alarm. 'Oh, she is only out in the courtyard at the back, driving in the sledge for a little while.' For it was in the winter, and I had for a long time been hankering after the splendid sledge-road in the courtyard. But, as you may suppose, I was severely taken to task for it by my more matronly friends—and still more severely when, on another occasion, I kept all my friends waiting at home while I and some of my former schoolfellows were

enjoying a walk in the market-place—and meanwhile the unfortunate servant at home had just to make the best she could of it."

But the Ahufrau's experiences, though costly, were not in vain, for she became as excellent a housewife as was to be found in all Suabia one who not only attended well to household and kitchen, but who also understood the management of fields and gardens, stables and meadows-ves, and even of cows and calves. The children who followed each other in quick succession were not looked upon as burdens and plagues, but welcomed as gifts from God. Nevertheless. there was no undue fuss made about them. Each bed was occupied by two children, which arrangement might, in any disturbance of brotherly concord, have proved fatal. Gottlieb and Christian, for instance, who in after years were the most amicable of brothers, in their early childhood were something of a Don Manuel and Don Caspar. and used literally to seize each other by the hair to such an extent that their mother at last determined to have their heads shaved. They used often to relate how strange it had felt to pass their hands slowly over their smooth bald heads.

Calamities of all sorts—chicken-pox, whooping-cough, scarlet-fever -were of course not wanting; but through all these troublesome waters the Ahufrau bravely steered her course. One day she was in the cowshed giving the dairymaid a practical lesson in the art of milking, when suddenly the whole troop of children came rushing in together, screaming out, "Christian has been eating the rats' poison -Christian has swallowed some of the rats' poison!" With great presence of mind the mother seized hold of the little culprit, and poured as much of the fresh warm milk down his throat as he could possibly be made to swallow, and in the violent sickness which followed upon the dose the poison and its dangers were got rid of, even before the

hastily-summoned doctor had time to make his appearance.

The Ahuherr's house was next door to an inn, and one day, when the Ahufrau was sitting alone with her children in the parlour, in walked, without the slightest ceremony, a somewhat corpulent old gentleman. "Can I have a pint of good ale?" he inquired. "Certainly," replied the Ahufrau, at once perceiving his mistake, and she brought from the cellar some better ale than the landlord of "The Swan" was ever wont to set before his guests. "I must have a roll with it," continued the stout old gentleman. "We have some nice fresh rolls just baked," answered the obliging housewife. light for my pipe also." "Sophia, bring some matches here," ordered the Ahufrau. "So !--and now leave me to myself," was the next command, for the children were standing with open mouths, staring at their strangely-mannered guest. "Certainly, I will take my children away. Come, children." And with imperturbable good humour the Ahufrau left the parlour with her children.

The stout old gentleman placed the pint of ale by his side, opened the window towards the street, and began, very much at his ease, to smoke his pipe. But just then his coachman, who meanwhile had been unharnessing his horses, happened to catch sight of him. "Why, master, where have you got to?" he exclaimed, in surprise. "Where? Why, in the inn, of course," retorted the stout old gentleman, sharply. "No. no, sir, not at all; that is the recorder's house. The inn is one door lower down."

In a tremendous hurry the stout old gentleman shut down the window, put his pipe in his pocket, and stepped out of the door as quietly as he had come in noisily, looking round him first in the vain hope of discovering some servant on whom he might bestow some sort of fee. But at Christmas-time, by way of a return, there came a box of excellent preserved fruits "for the dear children," and it is said that the stout old gentleman behaved himself more courteously thenceforward, even when he was only at an inn.

Thus, no matter what circumstances were, the Ahufrau always proved equal to the occasion, and retained throughout the same buoyant disposition. No one who met the slender, delicate-looking woman would have imagined how firm a rule she exercised in her own home as housewife and mother, nor what an active example she set her daughters in indoor or outdoor work of all kinds, in which even servant-maids of some experience would gladly seek her advice and assistance.

And thus the abundant blessing which rested upon her home, and which seemed only to increase with each new birth, never fled from her like an affrighted dove, but seemed continually to gather strength. Tust as an industrious vine-dresser improves the generous wine, which, while it is a wondrous gift to him from Heaven, is yet at the same time the reward of the honest labour of his hands.

But although the Ahufrau was so discreet and dutiful a wife, it did once happen, as she herself acknowledged, that on an occasion which threatened the peace and happiness of her young family she did not go quite the right way to work with her lord and master. "Lords and masters" must put up with a mistake of this sort now and then. Let

her tell the tale.

"It chanced that two government commissioners came to our neighbourhood. I forget now what brought them, but they were gentlemen of rank who had some business to transact with my husband, and they seemed to take great delight in his society. Every evening they would make him join them at 'The Swan,' and, as the general company there was not select enough to suit them, they would shut themselves into a little room apart.

"Now, a more thoroughly upright and prudent man than my husband never existed; not even an emperor could have induced him to say or do anything wrong or untrue; but it was his weak point to be excessively pleased when any people of distinction invited him to have friendly intercourse with him. Perhaps this was the consequence of

the extreme poverty and isolation in which he had grown up.

"He knew nothing of cards, and had a great horror of gambling; however, one evening he informed me that the young men had been teaching him a most ingenious game—he would never have believed

it possible a game of cards could be so interesting.

"This struck me at once unpleasantly; however, I made no remark upon it at the time. But when every evening regularly the two gentlemen called for him, and when he, who had hitherto been punctual to the minute in coming home, began to linger on with them later and later still, growing ever more and more eager for their society, and caring less and less to concern himself with any of his former friends, I became uneasy, and at last mustered up courage to suggest to him, 'But, papa, don't you think you are growing almost too fond of this game and this distinguished company? Used you not yourself to say that the first card which a man takes into his hand is the first hair by which the devil seizes him?' But this only made him extremely angry. 'Do you suppose I am so weak that I cannot leave off when I choose? How could I be so rude to these gentlemen as to refuse to join in an amusement which gives them so much pleasure?'

"Alas! he himself found pleasure in it also. But I dared not venture on any further remark, even though I noticed that he began to take out money from the cash-box much oftener than before, and would seem desirous of hiding this from me, which had never been his way. Moreover, he would often come home in a very bad temper, and then on the following day would be all the more eager for the card-table. It was a terrible trouble to me, and many a sleepless night I passed in silent meditation and prayer, considering what I

could best do to alter this state of things.

"Now, my husband had his study in the side wing of the old-fashioned building in which we dwelt, and the young men used

always to come there for him.

"So one evening, about the time when they generally came, I stole across the courtyard—as stealthily as though I were about some very evil deed—locked the front door, and brought away the key. Then with fear and trembling I waited beside the little kitchen window until I heard them come. They knocked at the door, then tried the latch (for there was no bell), and finally walked away, apparently in surprise and vexation. Then I slipped across again and unlocked the door. About an hour later my husband came in, and looked at the clock. 'So late! Has no one been here?'

"'Not with me,' I answered, my heart beating so fast that it nearly suffocated me. He paced sulkily up and down the room.

"Just then little Christian came running in. 'Papa! won't you

take us into the park again, just this once?'

"The proposal came exactly at the right time; he readily consented, and we all went out and enjoyed together the lovely fruits and flowers.

"On the following evening I repeated my experiment of locking the front door. (Luckily the study window did not face the front of the house.) The young men came and went away again as before, and on their way home they met our parlour-maid. 'Is the Recorder gone out of town?' they inquired. 'No, sir; he is at home.' 'But the front door is locked!' 'Then the master must have locked it himself!' she answered, for of course she knew nothing of my proceedings. 'Shall I inquire of my mistress?' 'Oh, no!' replied the commissioners, and shaking their heads they walked on.

"I again opened the door, and about a quarter of an hour afterwards my husband came in as before, very much out of sorts, but this time making no inquiries. Just at this moment our friend the Hofrath called; he had not been to see us for a long time, and to

me it seemed as though he were sent direct from Heaven."

"'I thought I would just look in and see how you all were, and whether you and I could have another game of draughts together?'

"'To be sure!' exclaimed my husband, brightening up at once.
'Augustus! bring the draught-board here, and let the Hofrath have another trial. I will astonish him, whatever he may say!'

"So the two sat down together once more, and I at the table with

my knitting, ready to cry with joy.

"'I met the merchant Mohrle just now,' observed the Hofrath.
'He was beaming all over with delight, and as usual talking more French than German. The government commissioners had invited him to a game of cards!"

"'The old fool!' exclaimed my husband, angrily. 'Just because he once stayed for six months in Strasburg, he considers himself a Frenchman, and thinks it is his duty to seek out the aristocracy.'

"And so the matter ended. The commissioners never came again, and my husband was much too proud to run after them. He spent his evenings at home, as in former days, and was happier than

ever. And so that danger passed happily away.

"You ask me if I was right in acting as I did? Not altogether, I suspect. My intense uneasiness and the violent beatings of my heart proved to me that the course on which I had entered was not exactly a straightforward one, although I had intended well. But God over-ruled it for good, because in my ignorance I knew not how to act more wisely. I always meant to acknowledge this to my husband, but one day, the conversation happening to turn on card-playing and its dangers, I heard him frankly say, 'Ah, yes! the demon of gambling had at one time almost laid hold of me also, but I saw the danger just in time and broke away from it.' Then I had not the heart to tell him how this had come to pass! And when, later still—in his last hours—he humbly thanked God for this very deliverance, and ascribed all the praise of it to Him, I felt that there was no need for any further confession, and that soon he would

understand my whole heart and its intentions better even than I could myself."

In the midst of all this budding, sprouting, and maturing of the healthy twigs and branches of a powerful stem, there came the chill, cold blast of Death, and the father of the family, the prop and glory of the house, fell beneath its icy breath.

The Ahufrau had long ago, even in her youth, cause to dread this enemy. Her husband was a tall, thin man, and very soon after

her marriage, people had pronounced him consumptive.

"That was a terrible weight upon me," she would often say in later years: and then she would relate a singular dream, which had seemed to her of great significance, for even in her lively, active mind there was a secret leaning towards a belief in dreams and tokens.

"It was at the time when I was so anxious about my husband's supposed tendency to consumption, and feared lest an early death should take him from me and my little ones. I dreamed one night that I was alone in a great solitary churchyard, and suddenly an awful figure appeared to me, whom I recognised at once as Death. In bitter anguish I cried out to him, 'Oh, Death! do not bereave me of my husband!' 'Entreat me three times,' Death replied, 'and I will spare him to you.' Once, twice, I entreated, but just as I was about to entreat him for the third time, little Conrad screamed, and I awoke."

For the time her husband was spared to her; but when he died, although he was sixty years of age, the Ahufrau could not restrain the thought, "Perhaps, if I had been able to entreat the third time,

I might have kept him longer!"

Her husband's death was a turning-point in the life of the Ahufrau, and though her buoyant spirit after a time recovered its elasticity, and rose again to the joys and duties of a mother's life, it was henceforward in a still quiet twilight that her prolonged and farextending life glided on its quiet way.

She lived to see her attractive and well-educated daughters leave her side with the husbands of their choice, to establish homes and households of their own, and she decorated her own widowed home

to welcome her sons' blooming brides.

In every direction, from the valley of the Neckar to the bleaker clime of Albany, in the mansion and in out-of-the-way rectory-houses, she everywhere found a home—a home to which she might address her little laconic epistles of greeting and advice, and in which she could share with her loved ones their anxieties, joys, and sorrows.

For herself she preferred to remain alone—alone with her active and intelligent mind, and with the memories and associations of her youth. The old home passed into other hands, strangers went in and out of its hospitable doors, and the Ahufrau retired to a less fashionable part of the town; where, however, she soon established,

by means of the old family portraits, the handsome chiming clock, and sundry pieces of old-fashioned furniture, a cosy, cheerful-looking home, attractive to old and young. Her sole companion was a faithful old woman, who, with all the virtues of a confidential servant, combined also all her failings, and did her best to govern her mistress. Of the sons and daughters, who had long since made their own positions in the world, she was accustomed to speak with the utmost familiarity; and the family letters were all common property between her mistress and herself. She had a frugal mind, this faithful old Susannah, but it was more in her mistress's interests than her own. She would sometimes almost scold the Ahufrau: and on one occasion, on being desired to give a sausage, which had remained over from the breakfast-table, to a messenger, she distinctly refused to

be guilty of such extravagance.

But yet the Ahufrau's life was by no means monotonous. Her easy circumstances enabled her to be of help and comfort to very many. Having grown up from her childhood among the inhabitants of the little town which had been her one and only home, she was now looked up to from far and wide as the trusted and faithful counsellor of rich and poor. One day the old maid Cicely would come in from the country, to talk, it may be, over some domestic concern; another day there would come a well-to-do labourer from the neighbouring village. "If you please, ma'am, I thought I would just like to ask your advice-there's my big boy wants to get married!" "Well, Geiger, is there any great harm in that? Your big boy is about thirty, I believe?" "Yes, but then,-the girl has no money." "But has she a good character?" "Oh, yes; an excellent character, and she is industrious, but still we can't think of it." "Well, but such a good character is a vast deal better than money," said the Ahufrau, bringing forward all the most convincing arguments she could think of.

"Yes, that's all very true, ma'am—but there's another drawback even then."

"What's that?"

"Why, the girl won't have him; and she's going to marry some-body else."

"Oh, you stupid old man! Then why have you kept me here

talking about it all this time?"

But the worthy Ahufrau's advice was not always wasted in this fashion, and even when there were no acquaintances requiring it, there were always opportunities enough when it was needed in her own family circle. From hill and vale there would come letters, telling, here, of the birth of a great-grandchild, there, of the confirmation of a grandson, or perhaps of the approaching marriage of a granddaughter—and so the grandmother's bountiful hand found more than enough to do. Towards Christmas her rooms were almost like a booking-office until the numerous little hampers and

boxes were despatched, in the contents of which no one was for-

gotten.

In return for these there would come letters of thanks, New Year and birthday greetings, and little offerings from the grandchildren, most of which were laid by carefully in a drawer as pleasant tokens

of affection, for which, however, she had but little use.

And then, too, as still more precious pledges of her life, her own children would come to stay with her, bringing all their anxieties and joys. And yet these visits were sometimes almost as great an anxiety as a pleasure to the old lady, who still thought much of keeping up her reputation, and was especially desirous that her housekeeping should appear to best advantage before her daughters-in-law—for which special purpose, on these occasions she always kept a private

cookery-book upon her bedroom table.

The Ahufrau's life had certainly been a most happy one, but although it had so many charms for her, and she had so thoroughly enjoyed it, yet in her there was none of that sickly clinging to life which so often accompanies old age. She had never weakly turned aside from drinking the bitter drops in her cup of life, and so for her there was no bitterness remaining in its dregs. With the same quiet trustfulness with which she had encountered life, she now met tranquilly the approach of death. For even in the midst of all the wear and tear of youth, her heart and treasure had long been fixed in that land whither death would bring her.

Tended faithfully by loving hands, blessed and blessing to the last, the Ahufrau closed her life in peace, and was spared the trial of a lengthened illness. The lips, which in life had been so skilled in sprightly repartee, in those last moments spoke only words of loving greeting and heartfelt benedictions to her dear ones, proving how often it is not only the still waters which run deep. "By grace ye are saved." were the words which she herself chose to be the text

of her funeral sermon.

Such was the Ahufrau in life and death. I cannot, of course, expect that this unpretending portrait of her should possess for others in general all the charm which her own immediate relations may find in it; but if it should serve here and there to call into existence even one heart so loved and loving as herself, it will have amply fulfilled its purpose.

THROUGH HOLLAND.

N the road to Friesland, halting at Groningen by the way. The quaint, old-world Sassenpoort, with its numerous turrets, loomed out as we left Zwolle: the old tower of the Roman Catholic church upreared its ungraceful head. Would the country, about to be passed through, prove as monotonous as that which had gone before?

To begin with, the fields on either side were very much under water. The windmills evidently had lately been out for a holiday. The only object amidst this waste to arrest attention was a graceful heron, with long legs and brilliant plumage, flapping its wings and looking at us as if it wondered where we too had found our flying powers. The journey must last some hours; but, after all, it was not unpleasant to be sitting in a well-padded carriage, though the scenery on either side might be monotonous. It was rest at any rate: and that is especially grateful when the clockwork that regulates the human machinery has run itself down in wandering through streets, looking up old churches, noting the points of unknown pictures, and searching in vain after signs and signatures that do not exist.

Presently we came upon the moors, purple with heather. The turf had been cut away many feet deep for peat to supply the fires of the peasantry; and indeed of the towns also; where it would send forth that delicious, homely odour which never fails as a reminder of by-

gone days spent now and again in remote French villages.

Now a halt at Dalfsen: the station-house on the one hand, a farm-house with straggling outbuildings on the other. The farm was gracefully covered with vines; and, surrounding the entrance, row upon row, were the blue and brass milk cans. Beside us a brook, in which many ducks comforted themselves. But at this moment the engine sent forth dense volumes of smoke upon them, which evidently ruffled their serenity. With an indignant quack they left the water, and one behind another waddled up to the farm door to lay their complaint before a beloved and sympathetic mistress. Soon after this we reached Meppel. Here our passengers changed for Groningen, and for five and twenty minutes had the pleasure of cooling their heels in an already too chilly atmosphere.

These things have to be borne in patience. The waiting-room was tolerably full of men and women, all very much of one class; the men smoking and drinking beer, and eating their inevitable slices of bread and cheese. A loud bell rang, and away they went; not, however, abandoning their delicacies, but carrying them off in triumph. A tall lady, in a gold helmet surmounted by a hat and black feathers

that nodded like the plumes of a hearse and looked simply ridiculous, rushed out with both hands and mouth full, and was followed by the greater portion of the room. A big ungainly woman, who, in running, somehow reminded you of a frolicsome cow. Why are there such women? Why were they not all made to tread softly and go gently, and be everything that is feminine? How is it that some with every movement remind you of a whirlwind? But the train these people rushed off to was not my train. For the Groningen passengers there was a further twenty minutes' exercise of self-control. When it came to an end and we were once more in motion, the shades of night had begun to fall, and those who had not cats' eyes had to draw upon their mental resources for amusement. At last there came a halt, the welcome cry of "Groningen!" from various porters, and our journey was over.

Darkness had long shut out the world when the station was left for the omnibus. The drive through the streets to the hotel seemed interminable. Here, so far north, I had expected to find things and people as fresh and primitive and unchanged as they were a century or two ago. I reckoned without my host. Groningen is one of the oldest towns in Holland, but, as far as could now be seen, streets and houses were modern, straight, and regular, and proportionately uninteresting. At length the omnibus turned into the square or market-

place, and drew up at the hotel.

In the matter of hotels Groningen seems to be behind the age. This was the best in the town, yet one of the least comfortable in civilised Holland. The room was small and ill-ventilated. The bed must have once belonged to a monastery where bodily chastisement was a condition of the order. A small wooden box, surrounded by thick curtains that seemed of no use but to prevent all air from reaching the sleeper. In vain I asked for a better room. They had a few larger, certainly, but they were all occupied. This was no doubt true, for the noise that went on into the small hours of the night: doors banging; voices sounding; boots thrown out; steps running up and downstairs that certainly came not from the velvet paws of a cat: all proved the tale true. I made the best of it, determined that one night should limit my stay in Groningen.

The next morning I came down early. In the long breakfast-room small equipages of white china for tea and coffee, such as we had been favoured with at Hoorn, were ranged down the table. After breakfast I went into the town. The market-place, to begin with, is one of the finest and largest in Holland. A very few of the houses were old and curious; but the greater portion were distinguished for nothing but a certain brightness of aspect. This cheerful tone signalised the whole town, and was its chief characteristic. The ancient monuments and houses and picturesque costumes, the old-world manners and customs I had expected to find, were conspicuous by their absence. The shops were large and flourishing, with great plate-glass windows

worthy of Paris; the latest Parisian fashions perambulated the streets. Even the shop-girls wore hats and feathers, and towers of hair, and trailing skirts. Everyone seemed flourishing and rich. The air of wealth and prosperity that in a quiet way enveloped Groningen could not be mistaken. It is a successful town: in this respect one of the chief towns of Holland. Few visitors trouble it; but men of business come and go in a constant stream. In vain I wandered about in search of the antique. I found it not.

It was market day, and stalls were scattered over the market-place in full operation: from the picturesque vegetables, to the necessary, but by no means sweet-scented, fish stalls. One man came out of a side street with a net and bargained with a fat vrouw for a large basin of eels. The affair was at length concluded, and the eels were turned into the net; upon which the cunning fish as fast as possible slipped through the holes, scattering themselves and the people far and wide. The women screamed and affected very pretty airs of terror, and picked up their petticoats, no doubt thinking it a fine opportunity for displaying the neatest ankles in the world. The woman abused the man for bringing anything so senseless as a net for carrying away eels; and the man, like a true son of Adam, retaliated by blaming the vrouw for the smallness of her fish.

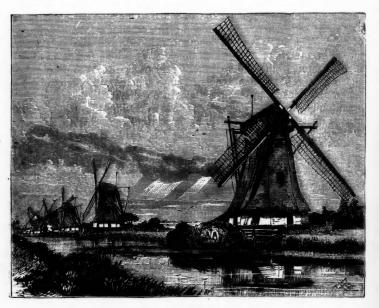
Immediately beyond the right-hand corner of the market-place, the old tower of St. Martin reared its venerable head; the most interesting monument Groningen possesses. The church is a Gothic structure, but less worthy of attention than the tower. It is built somewhat after the style of the tower of Utrecht, but though less ancient, looked more so, and it is said to be 430 feet high. Thus, go where you will in these old towns, you are certain to find at least one object to redeem your visit from absolute failure and disappointment.

Groningen possesses a rather celebrated university, and many benevolent institutions, most famous among them the asylum for the deaf and dumb. But the town is for the most part given up to commerce, and herein lies its strength and wealth. You will not find the noise and confusion of such a place as Amsterdam. With all its business—very much of which lies in various kinds of grain—there is a quietness about it that is pleasant: a certain repose (the hotels at night excepted) that would almost lend a charm, if that were possible, to the prosaic interests of sale and barter.

A very few hours showed me all I cared to see of Groningen, and found me on my way to Leeuwarden, the capital of Friesland. This was the last point northwards I intended to touch in my present visit to Holland. Beyond this, indeed, the country has little interest.

The sun shone hotly as we steamed out of Groningen that Friday morning. The sky was almost cloudless. It was somewhat of a relief to get away from this modern-looking town, with its straight streets and houses that all resembled each other, into the open country. Open enough, certainly; and flat; with little beyond the

sheep and the cows, the windmills and fields of grain, to claim attention. But it was something to watch the peasants reaping and stacking; strong-looking, sunburnt, happy men and women. A change to have the sun shining. Yesterday we had travelled in great coats: to-day airy garments and windows open to the grateful breezes. The very sheep looked pure and white, while yesterday they were a dingy brown. The old Spanish proverb ought to be especially applicable to Holland: "Feed a sheep with grass and he repays you in wool." Now we passed over a canal upon which a



A BATCH OF WINDMILLS.

barge with its brown sails filling to the wind was a pleasant object to break in upon the monotony of the landscape. At Grypskerk we waited many minutes, apparently for no cause but that the train, slow enough in all conscience, was yet before its time. So the guards and officials assembled together in the waiting-room, and over sundry glasses of beer chatted about the change in the weather and the beauty of the cattle we were carrying, and the wonderful patience travellers must exercise in Holland. The surrounding prospect was pretty, almost diversified. Rich green fields and dykes, and happy cattle chewing the cud of reflection, or appearing to do so; small picturesque cottages surrounded by trees, and shrubs, and creepers, each rejoicing in a small garden and a bit of cultivated land. Trees bounded the

horizon, which to-day had taken quite a purple and romantic tone, that really seemed out of place in practical Holland. As seen this morning there was nothing dreary, or dismal, or monotonous in all this wide tract of land, this sameness of prospect. The sky, with its white fleecy clouds, was in itself a picture. Not one of the least pleasant features in the landscape was the reflection of the bright blue sky and white clouds in the surrounding dykes: lighting up the landscape as mirrors do a room. The sun, too, sparkled upon the water like so many jewels, bright and dazzling. Here a white patch upon the emerald grass announced a brood of ducks: a picture of calm repose after a mid-day meal. Would we could often feel as much. To-day, every separate object, the whole collectively, was thoroughly enjoyable. More than ever it was easy to perceive that Holland,

above all countries, must be done in fine weather.

Buitenpost: the village close to the station. It was marvellous how the sunshine brought out all the tones, all the peculiarities of Dutch scenery. Every leaf was glinting in the bright light. Dutch tiles caught the reflection and looked lively. There was an air of cheerfulness upon everything: a broad smile, not loud laughter. Just as it is for the most part with the Dutch themselves. They do not go into enthusiasms and ecstacies and gushing exhibitions. They are somewhat grave; even stern-looking; but when spoken to they for the most part reply with a smile. The only enthusiastic exhibition I witnessed was on the road to Groningen, when the shades of night were falling. A young man was met at one of the stations by a group of five or six young men on the platform. As the train came up and they caught sight of the traveller, canes were swung in the air, hands and hats were waved in token of recognition. The train stopped; he opened his window, and before getting down shook hands violently all round. Then, jumping out, he repeated the greeting with renewed energy, and kissed two boys that were of the party. One took his coat, another his bag, all crowded about him, and trod upon each other's heels in their endeavours to get close to the place of honour. It was a refreshing exhibition. In my solitude I almost envied the possessor of so many friends.

Hardegaryp. The guard came up for tickets: a welcome sign of the near approach to Leeuwarden. The air swarmed with gnats and The grass was rich and yellow with buttercups. dykes were broad as rivers, their surface sparkling in the sunlight. The horizon was bounded by windmills and numerous church spires. A breeze was blowing, so fresh and grateful, we might have been on the very borders of the sea. A few moments more and the train

stopped.

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Leeuwarden was altogether a different experience from Groningen. Here once more I found myself amidst streets more thoroughly intersected by canals than many other places I had seen in Holland They seemed really the principal part of the town, and sometimes left no space between the long rows of houses but a small amount of pavement for foot passengers. Everything looked more primitive and old-world-like than in the town I had lately quitted. The people and the place wore a distinctive aspect, worthy of a race dating back to the very earliest days of Dutch history. The women of Friesland are celebrated for their good looks, and justly so. There were more pretty girls in its streets and windows than I could easily count. The maidens went about in their gold and silver helmets, peculiar ornaments, and picturesque dresses. But, as said the landlord of the hotel, they rebel more and more against these head-dresses, which conceal their flowing locks and so much of their beauty; and every year diminishes the number of quaint costumes. Whether with the change of habits and manners they will lose any of their charms, remains to be proved.

Here, also, as fate would have it, it was market day, and the day being still quite young, I came upon the midst of the bustle. It was a lively and unusual scene. The market was held on the banks of the canal: row after row of vegetable and other stalls. On the water were various barges which had brought up their wares for sale: toys and cheap cutlery, and small household goods and chattels. The costumes of the Friesland women, varied and picturesque, added much to the gaiety of the assemblage. Loud tones and noisy laughter predominated. Everyone looked busy and happy, as if for them life was made up of golden hours. Certainly they were just now golden as the sun could make them: and the water reflected its hot rays in myriads of sparkling jewels, that found their rivals in

the brilliant glances of the blue-eyed women.

As in Groningen, so in Leeuwarden, the chief thing to strike you is the cheerful aspect of the town, not the quaintness of form and outline, or the antiquity of each separate structure. That important feature quite disappears in this part of Holland, to the surprise and disappointment of the traveller. Leeuwarden has a few interesting buildings, such as the prisons and the House of Correction; and that is all. The latter is a gem in its way; one of the quaintest houses in Holland, with its mixture of red and yellow brick and stone work, its statues of the Virtues, and its gabled roofs and windows. Before this building a formidable sentinel kept guard, and eyed suspiciously any endeavour to penetrate into the mysteries of the interior. prisons are perhaps the finest in Holland. For beauty and order they are scarcely to be surpassed in Europe. The town is irregularly built; for that reason the more picturesque. Beyond the houses, by the side of a broad canal, the people have made themselves a promenade or semi-park, much patronised during the summer months. The churches of Leeuwarden are not worthy of any special notice.

After dinner that evening I chanced to pass a building wherein a considerable noise was going on; and, entering, found it to be a Jewish synagogue. The service was peculiar as it was novel. The

contortions and genuflexions; the swayings of the body towards all points of the compass; the wailing noises, which gradually rose from a half-whisper to the most frantic strains; the extraordinary rapidity of utterance; the manner in which a worshipper would occasionally turn round to a neighbour, and, at the loudest moment of these discordant wailings, ask some apparently business question: all this was calculated to excite unpleasant astonishment, and raise a feeling it was perhaps as well not to analyse. I recognised in a man who followed me into the building the owner of an old curiosity shop I had visited that afternoon, where I had stumbled upon some fine specimens of real old Worcester china. Had he come to blot out from his conscience a recollection of having imposed upon me, or endeavoured to do so? I soon had had enough of the synagogue, and departed, bewildered yet relieved.

The hotel, the Nieuwe Doelen, was extremely comfortable and highly to be recommended. I felt almost sorry to leave it early the next morning. But I had promised A to meet him at Arnhem, where we were to pass the Sunday together. A very few hours,

moreover, were sufficient to devote to Leeuwarden.

The morning was yet so early when we steamed away, that the surrounding country was enveloped in a thick white mist. The air was fresh but chilly, and wonderfully damp. By half-past eight the mist began slowly to disperse. A few yards of ground might be distinguished on either side, a heavy dew upon the grass looking like hoar frost. As the mist gradually cleared, the country looked almost like a snow landscape. Approaching Dedemsvaart, the mist rose in a body, as it seemed, and rolled off the face of the earth in a thick white cloud, far away into the sky. Then the sun burst forth, and quickly dispelled the dew upon the grass. The Dutch, one would think, ought to be rheumatic, yet are not. They look the healthiest people on the face of the globe. Petty ailments, dyspepsia and such-like, seem to be unknown to them; on the other hand, they are much subject to diseases of the throat and chest. I had one travelling companion this morning, to whom the mist and the dew seemed as marrow and fatness: whilst I was every now and then driven half frantic by neuralgic pains which shot through the head like lightning, and happily disappeared as quickly.

The last remnant of the mist cleared finally just in time to show up the old Sassenpoort and church-tower of Zwolle. I had seen a good deal since leaving it; travelled northwards in search of pre-Adamite men and manners—and found them not. Here I parted company with my neighbour. He was going to Utrecht—I to Arnhem. How polite they are, some of these Dutch, and with them it is in great part genuine. We had not spoken a word during the journey. Now he got up and bowed. I returned the civility. He got down his bag and umbrella and bowed again. I returned the compliment. He opened the door and bowed again. I could do no less.

Finally he got out, turned round, and would have bowed again, but his hands were full, and he therefore inclined his body to an angle of 45. Not to be outdone in politeness, I too inclined my body to an angle of 45, and, having both hands at liberty, doffed my hat with due ceremony. The Dutchman went off charmed, smiling all over his face. After all, it is better to have a little too much civility and attention than a little too little.

Travelling southwards, the country gradually assumed a richer and more cultivated aspect: a beauty somewhat more voluptuous. Now we passed the Yssel, wide, calm, and clean-looking, with low banks and clear waters that reflected the blue sky. To the right a shallow sheet of water, with trout plashing about its surface; raising in the



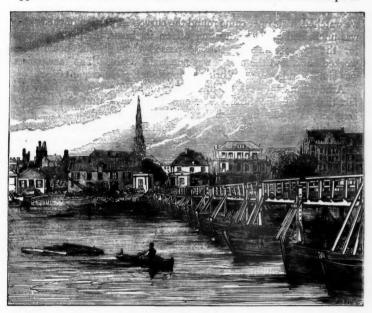
House of Correction, LEEUWARDEN.

breast longing but cruel feelings of a possible sport not to be obtained' Approaching Arnhem a new type of scenery disclosed itself. Undulations and even hills. Tall trees with foliage so rich we felt instinctively that our face was turned towards Germany. A lovely winding river, which might have been the Rhine, but was still the Yssel. Before all this change could be thoroughly realised, we came to an anchor. The day's journey was over.

In Arnhem you feel as if you had said farewell to Holland. All that is quaint and curious and characteristic of that country has disappeared. There is almost an air of fashion about the place: the air that distinguishes those towns that have their "season." Large, modern, white-faced houses showed themselves in profusion; hotels guiltless of the pride of antiquity. The old portion of the town remains much as it always has been, but without the quaintness to be found in so many of the Dutch cities.

The Rhine, which is here a tolerably broad stream, flows past, and goes winding on towards the sea. Calm and placid, it seems to have lulled itself into apathy after its long eventful journey through some of the loveliest scenery in the world. The country, up to a certain point, is still beautiful at Arnhem, but after this the Rhine bids farewell to all hills and undulations and everything of a romantic tendency.

The neighbourhood of Arnhem is justly considered the most beautiful in Holland: but it must be remembered how nearly it approaches the borders of a land that has few rivals in this respect.



BRIDGE OF BOATS, ARNHEM.

The town is picturesquely situated. Wooded slopes and hills throw themselves about; charming houses nestle amidst a wealth of verdure. The trees are no longer stunted and barren, but full-grown and leafy. The Rhine adds much to the general effect, and throws a certain suspicion of romance over all: for romance and Rhine are synonymous terms. Here many of the wealthy Dutch have their country places, and escape in summer from the heat and smells of the town to the pure air and fair pastures of Guelderland. But about here, if it is still Holland, you feel that it has no business to be so.

The Rhine is here crossed by a picturesque bridge of boats. It was an idle occupation but interesting, to stand upon the bridge and watch the steamers going up and down the river. Before us lay the

town, much of it concealed by the intervening trees; thick foliage that glinted and rustled in the sunshine. Behind us a tract of flat country that after a walk of some fifteen miles would land us in Germany. Right and left the river flowed peacefully and pleasantly, creating a longing to jump on board one of the steamers and follow its upward course. To the left a curve soon lost it to view. The rich banks and slopes and wooded heights curved round with it. After the barrenness of Holland, all this wealth of verdure was startling, difficult to realise. No wonder the Dutch think so much of their beloved Guelderland. We should do the same in their place. As we watched, a steamer came round the curve. A portion of the pridge was unchained and went floating off on its boats, leaving a passage for the approaching vessel. It passed through, the boats were worked back, and the bridge was put right again. The mechanism was simple and easy; the bridge altogether a picturesque object.

Arnhem must always be interesting to an Englishman from the fact that Sir Philip Sidney here ended his days after the battle of Zutphen, in 1586, in which he was mortally wounded. The great church is a fine structure, imposing from its size, built of brick, with lofty arches, that, like so many of the Dutch churches, are vaulted with wood. Its chief interior attraction was a splendid monument of Egmont, Duke of Guelders, enclosed in a portion of the church railed off from the touch and tread of the profane. The sacristan keeps the key, and, like other sacristans, is of a persuasive disposition. Above, midway to the roof, fixed on a small platform against the inner north wall, was the kneeling figure of the duke, dressed in the armour that he wore in battle. The effect of this figure was peculiar and weird-like; almost unpleasant. So life-like, it almost seemed as if for some penance he had been doomed to kneel there through the ages: perhaps, like the Flying Dutchman, waiting for some maiden to be true to him to the death, and break the spell that held him in bondage. However this may be, there the figure remains, startling as it strikes upon you in sharp outlines against the windows and the stronger light behind; and after you have left the church, and long after you have quitted the country, it haunts your imagination and seems to throw a spell over your remembrance of the town which does not fade away. Opposite the church is the town hall, the Devil's house, as it is called, from the number of sculptured and grinning masques that adorn the front. It was under repair when we visited Arnhem, and probably many of the decorations would have disappeared when dust and scaffolding were cleared away. I had not heard of this house with the terrible name, and on the Sunday morning an Englishman seated opposite to me at the breakfast-table suddenly put the following question, with startling abruptness, in a deep double bass voice: "Sir, can you tell me which is the Devil's house?" At the instant I thought he asked for information upon the real subject, and with solemn query pointed

downwards. Finally we came to a better understanding, and by the help of a waiter obtained the necessary information. Not, however, without a mishap. Of two ladies with him, one was making tea, and the question so took away her presence of mind that she overflowed the teapot and ruined the cloth. After this it was tantalising to find the Devil's house under repair; and, beyond the great green gates, where cunningly carved and grinning ghouls kept guard, and struck terror into the hearts of the timid, the scaffolding and the clouds of dust more effectually barred the entrance than if an army of imps

had suddenly been turned from stone into fell life.

There are many pleasant and picturesque drives about Arnhem; most favourite amongst them that to Roozendael. For some miles beyond the town, on either side the road, you pass a succession of showy country houses; some of them not built in the highest exercise of taste. At length a turning to the left, a short, shady road, and you reach Roozendael, with its walks and flowers; its ponds, where swans go sailing about; its greenhouses and well-arranged grounds. But most impressive of all, and in itself worth the drive, was a magnificent avenue of trees: an avenue of considerable width. trees formed a complete giant aisle and arch, meeting far overhead, obscuring daylight; dark and sombre, gloomy and weird to intensity. One could only stand and gaze, lost in admiration. Then, as we walked slowly through it, the effect diminished and disappeared. At the end we looked back and wondered where it had come from. But returning, and looking once more down the long vista, there again was the solemn sombre aisle in all its wonderful beauty and magnificence. The world contains far longer, grander, and finer avenues than this; I know none more impressive. It was a gigantic cathedral aisle, erected by Nature, more beautiful and sublime than any raised by the hand of man.

On the Saturday evening, in our walks, we had come upon a house that seemed almost the only remarkable one in Arnhem. of the exterior were sculptured, and its pointed mullioned windows seemed to indicate its having at one time been devoted to religious purposes. The door was opened and we ventured to look within, though, remembering the old woman at Zaandam, I trembled at my temerity. The master came forward, was all politeness and attention, and seemed flattered by our interest. The house, he said, had once been a convent. He pointed out one or two curious bits of carving, and said the house was full of such mementoes of a bygone day. It was growing dark, and appointing an hour for the following morning, he promised, if we would call, to show us over the whole place. But, alas, the next morning he had forgotten his appointment, and was not at home. His wife, a graceful and elegantly-dressed woman, came down to us, with all courtesy expressed her regret at her husband's absence, and begged us to return erewhile. Fate, however, or circumstances, willed it otherwise; and thus we lost the chance of seeing what appeared one of the most curious and interesting houses in Holland. But the slight episode was not without its moral: an instance of the extreme courtesy shown to utter strangers: evidence of a good will, lurking in the heart, sufficiently rare to make it, when thus found, go far in winning over one's affections towards a strange people.

A. left Arnhem on the Sunday night. He had been admitted to a certain museum in Amsterdam, where he could only paint from six to nine in the morning, and he wished to make the most of his time. On the Tuesday I also left Arnhem. The country, as we steamed



AMSTERDAM.

away, was for a short time excessively interesting. Undulating slopes, rich clusters of trees, long avenues cool and shady, and large, modern-looking white houses dotted about. But it soon gave place to ordinary landscape—long stretches of moors and purple heather, distant wind-mills and church spires. Towards Utrecht the landscape again became more undulating. White clouds above the horizon towered like snow mountains in the delicious blue of the sky. Moors and plantations disappeared. Pastures opened out; herds of grazing cattle; men and women toiling in the fields; fruit-laden orchards; long avenues of trees; now and then a fortress surrounded by a moat; a small graveyard, with tiny stones to mark where the dead were resting; the outskirts of a town; an agonising shriek from the engine; an

old tower, from which all Holland may be seen at a glance; a slackening of speed; and we stopped at Utrecht.

A few minutes here, and onward again. At the appointed hour I entered once more into the quaint old city of Amsterdam. Our stay in Holland was drawing to a close.

CHARLES W. WOOD.



BITTER WORDS.

I WEEP no more because thy words
Have ended all 'twixt thee and me,
But they have scared my singing birds,
Whose nest is cold within the tree.

Nor do I weep because the way
Is lonely now, uncheered by love;
But oh, the sultry, silvery grey,
And not to hear the lark above!

I weep no more that loving eyes
Have looked with loveless scorn on me,
But for the aching light that lies
Where Love's soft shadow used to be.

I would not weep, that long have fed On dainties, while my brethren pine, Could I but eat their common bread And slake my thirst with homelier wine.

I would not weep—my house of pride
Is rent asunder, roof and door—
But for the shapes that mock and glide,
Embalmed as holy heretofore.

I weep because no sun shall rise
When earth shall be as once it seemed,
And I, with soul-reviving sighs,
Shall, waking, say, "I only dreamed!"

And yet, and yet, a day may dawn
To music sweeter than a bird's,
And I, the veil of flesh withdrawn,
Shall hear no more those bitter words!

C. M. GEMMER (GERDA FAY).

BERTHA DANE.

YOU might have been puzzled to define the kind of room in which stood Berfha Dane—whether it might be meant for parlour or kitchen. A cottage piano filled one recess; a sewing-machine the other; the large windows were furnished with holland blind shades without; with hanging baskets, from which drooped ferns, within. But the grate was a large old-fashioned thing, with an oven and hobs, evidently meant for cooking; in fact, a small saucepan was simmering on one of the hobs at this moment, and the tea-kettle boiled on the other. It was the ordinary sitting and living room of the old-fashioned farmhouse: there was a better one on the other side the hall for high days and holidays.

At this farmhouse lived Mr. and Mrs. Robarts; generally addressed by Bertha as Uncle Stephen and Aunt Pen. But, in calling it a farmhouse, it must not be supposed that farming work was carried on in it. A few acres of land were attached to the house, and that was all. The Robarts family had been in the days gone by an improvident family, and the greater portion of the good broad lands were parted with before it came into the possession of the only son left—Stephen. He and his wife, middle-aged people now, lived here in peace and quiet on their very limited means; he cultivating the garden and the little land remaining to him; she practically attending to the household matters with untiring activity.

It wanted less than a fortnight of Christmas Day, and Aunt Pen had gone out on a shopping tour connected with the preparations for that hospitable season. Bertha, lifting now and again the lid of the little saucepan, stood by the fire crying. On the red cover of the centre table stood the tea-tray with its cups and saucers; a white cloth was spread over the opposite end of the table, a plate of bread-and-butter on it, and some knives and forks.

The entrance door was heard to open. Somebody stayed to take off hat and overcoat in the hall, and then came into the room: a small, short man, with a quiet thoughtful face and grey hair. He wore a suit of grey, and began to unbutton his leggings as he sat down by the fire.

"Where's your aunt, Bertha?"

"She went into the town to order currants and things, Uncle Stephen. And she said that, as it promised to be a fine evening, she might go on to see grandmamma. Uncle John would be sure to see her home at night."

"What's the matter, Bertha?" For Bertha had been unable to hide the sound of tears in her voice, and the moisture that glistened

on her eyelashes.

"Oh, nothing," she answered evasively; and forthwith began to make the tea in a bustle. Uncle Stephen, getting off the last gaiter, put that and its fellow in the corner behind the mantel-piece; and then had leisure to miss something in the room.

"What's gone with the hearth-rug, Bertha?"

"Aunt Pen rolled it up before she went," glancing at the far part of the room. "She said she could not trust me not to upset things upon it when I had cooking to do."

"Cooking?"

Bertha lifted the lid of the saucepan. "These kidneys are being stewed for you, Uncle Stephen. We thought you would want something better than bread-and-butter, as you could not get home to dinner."

Bertha turned the stewed kidneys into a dish as she spoke, placed it on the white cloth by her uncle's place, and then sat down to pour out the tea. Mr. Robarts was hungry, and did justice to the good cheer provided for him; but he had leisure to look at his niece between whiles. Her studied calmness, in spite of the compressed lips and brimming eyes, showed the self-control she was exerting; and he admired her for it. The girl had a nice face: bright dark eyes, and good, well-carved features, with a fresh, pure complexion. She was rather short, and she wore a shabby stuff gown, all over darns. But in spite of the shabbiness and the darns, her looks, her voice, and her self-contained manners all bespoke the gentlewoman.

"Bertha," said he again, "what's the matter?"

No answer. Just a sigh swallowed down with a gulp.

"Bertha, what is it that's the matter? Answer me, my dear."

"It is the rehearsal to-night: and—and Aunt Pen won't let me go."

The answer came with a burst of grief: the pent-up tears rained down now.

"Why not? Because she is out herself?"

"Yes. And it is such nonsense besides, she says. Oh, Uncle

Stephen! This night, of all nights, not to go!"

Aunt Pen was mistress and master, and Uncle Stephen knew it. Truth to say, he thought, and Bertha thought, that she had gone out on purpose that the girl should not go. He drew his easy chair to the fire and lighted his pipe. Bertha began to wash the tea-things on the table as they stood.

"Where's Sally?" asked he.

"News came that her little brother had met with a bad accident.

and Aunt Pen let her go home to see him."

The tea-things put away, the hobs cleared of the kettles, the hearthrug laid down, and the room altogether in order, Bertha sat to the table and got out some stocking-mending. But Mr. Robarts had finished his pipe then, and he went to the piano.

"Come along, Berthy."

If Stephen Robarts had one passion in life above all passions, it was the love of music. He played beautifully: as some of those self-taught natural geniuses do play. Bertha, although she was his wife's niece and not his, had the same passionate love for music,

the same innate taste for it.

He touched the keys of the worthless old piano—he could not afford to buy a better—and struck into the prelude of an anthem. Bertha stood at his side and sang it. Her clear, sweet, rich tones filled the room. It was Uncle Stephen who had cultivated her voice; who had given her this correct style; who had materially aided in making her what she was—a most charming singer. His love of oratorio music had taught her to be as familiar with it as most girls are with ballad-singing. Anthem after anthem she sang as she stood there: now one, now another. Absorbed in this beloved employment, Bertha recovered peace of mind, almost forgetting her disappointment.

"Go and get your shawl on, Berthy," he suddenly said. "You

shall not lose the meeting. I'll keep house."

Her whole face brightened up. What a nice face it was !--seen

with this rush of sunlight upon it.

"Oh, Uncle Stephen, how good of you! But—there'll be the kitchen fire to see to! And—you won't forget to wind up this lamp? It will be down about eight o'clock."

" All right, child."

When she came down stairs in her old plaid shawl and shabby hat, Uncle Stephen was blind and deaf to present concerns: all the higher cravings of the man's heart were for the moment satisfied by this glorious music of Handel's. Bertha thought there was every chance of the lamp running down and the kitchen fire going out. And then—when Aunt Pen came home, and found things in what she called a "state"——

"Uncle Stephen, do you think you can remember the lamp and

the fire?"

He nodded slightly to the question. The tears were rolling down his grey face as he contrived to sing the favourite air that always affected him, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." His voice had been good once, but it was weak now. Bertha stood listening at his elbow till it was over.

"And then, when we are up there, Berthy, face to face with Him, the Lord and Saviour, it won't matter what crosses we have suffered

here, will it, dear?"

"No, no, Uncle Stephen. Trouble will all be over then."

Bertha left him plunging into the Hallelujah Chorus. Tears had risen to her own eyes; and she stopped for a moment as she shut the house door behind her.

Poor Uncle Stephen! Would she ever be able to give him the one luxury he coveted—a new piano? As to an organ, it was simply

beyond all idea: but Uncle Stephen had left off wishing for that in

sheer hopelessness.

As she ran through the garden in the cold, and thence into the high road, Bertha Dane began wondering—she had so wondered many a time—how Stephen Robarts, the refined, dreamy man, had ever married so matter-of-fact, practical a woman as Penelope Bright. They were of a totally opposite nature. He loved music; music made her nervous; he thought a true genius for it to be the greatest of all God's gifts; she considered "those music people" to be next door to idiots for uselessness. While he, playing softly so as not to disturb her, lost himself in dream-land at the old piano, she rattled away at the sewing machine, or made pies and puddings in the kitchen. Mrs. Robarts had as much perception of the beauties of harmony as the machine needle had of the sheets it hemmed, or the rolling-pin of the paste it fashioned. But for the rubbishing music, Stephen might have been a more useful man than he was, and made more of his land, she used to say: and that was undoubtedly true.

Some few years ago, Bertha Dane, a timid girl of fourteen, had come from a distance to live with them. Poor though they were, they took to her as their own, and did not grudge the cost she would be. For the child, whose father had been a curate and her mother Penelope's sister, was suddenly left an orphan; both parents having died within a few weeks of each other. The child was a lady when she came to them: brought up to be one: but Aunt Pen at once began to train her in usefulness, and Bertha's days of study were over. Beyond the reading of a few books and the cultivation of her taste for music, which Stephen undertook, Bertha got no intellectual instruction; but she grew clever at domestic duties, and had learnt to sew as well as her aunt. She had no money: none: and felt grateful

to them for the home they gave her.

About a twelvemonth before this evening we are writing of, some ladies and gentlemen in the adjoining town, Crossdale, had formed themselves into a society for practising music and singing, calling it the Philharmonic Society. This society thought a great deal of itself socially, boasting of one baronet amid its members and three ladies of title. A public artiste had been allowed to join it, principally for the benefit derived from her style, also two finished singers from the choir of a neighbouring cathedral: these three were paid for their services. In good truth, there was no very shining light at Crossdale, whether male or female; not one who could attempt difficult parts in And the society gave public performances sometimes, in behalf of divers charities. Through the interest of her uncle, Stephen Robarts, Bertha Dane had been allowed to join this society. He would have liked to join it himself; but feared he should be looked upon as "too old:" few of the members were over thirty or thirty-five years of age. That objection could not apply to Bertha. and he got her admitted quietly, saving nothing about it at home to

anybody. But when he confessed what he had done, and Bertha was lost in an ecstacy of rapture, Aunt Pen was more angry than she had ever been, and wanted to send and do away with Bertha's election; scratch her name off the roll of the society. As good make her into an actress at once, protested Aunt Pen: and that music must have turned Stephen clean mad.

However, for once Stephen carried his own will. With much coaxing and deprecation, he pointed out to his wife that the child's one sole recreation was music, that her voice and her talent were above the common, and that they had no right to deny her the opportunity of improvement. So Aunt Pen, who prided herself upon being just, and who really was so, gave in with a good deal of

grumbling.

The one white day in the week for Bertha was Thursday. At eight o'clock the society met in the concert hall for their practising. Sometimes, however, they met only once a fortnight: always so in summer. Few of the members had taken any notice of Bertha: the quiet girl of retiring manners, who was always dressed poorly, was obviously not worthy of it. Ready money was sadly short at Uncle Stephen's; and Aunt Pen never laid out a farthing unnecessarily.

Away walked Bertha under the starlight, drawing her old plaid shawl closely round her throat. The town was not far off, the road anything but lonely, gas lamps lighting it all the way. Bertha felt as safe as in her own parlour at home. She generally went alone: but

Uncle Stephen would fetch her back.

Bertha, conscious that she was late, entered the hall just as the members rose to sing the opening chorus. Somewhat abashed, she was about shrinking into a back seat when the leader's sharp eyes fell on her. A rapid nod brought her forward to her usual bench, the first in the row of the general chorus singers. When Bertha was first given this seat, it was her one idea of perfect bliss, for right in front of her sat that charming singer, Miss Carpenter, the one paid lady Bertha could touch her handsome garments, watch her mobile features, and catch every sound of the marvellous voice. Oh, what a wonderful creature, in Bertha's eyes, was Miss Carpenter! A woman who sang in fashionable places, with a salary of nobody knew what; who appeared at concerts in wondrous dresses, and trilled out pathetic little ballads, when encored after a heavy scena, that literally brought down the room; who took the applause like a queen accepting homage, seemed to think nothing of her triumph, and was sent carefully home in a carriage!

Bertha would give Uncle Stephen imitations of this wonderful woman's surpassing style, and he would kiss his little niece, praise her voice, and declare that, for his part, he knew Berthy could do as well

if she only had a chance.

The remark would send Berthy into low spirits. She never would have such a chance. It was so dim, so imaginary. She had no

money to pay for good instruction; no influential friends to introduce her to the notice of prominent masters; no courage to put herself

forward or try to attract observation.

The conductor of these meetings was a Mr. Mason, the organist of the principal church of Crossdale; he had a bald head, and Bertha thought him very stern: but he had talked to her a little lately: and once he had called her to his side and seemed to listen attentively to her while she sang in the chorus. He was in his place this evening, and Miss Carpenter was in hers: and Bertha was, as usual, in the seventh heaven of delight. A sacred concert was to be given in public the day after Christmas, and they were now practising for it. More than ever was Bertha this evening enchanted with Miss Carpenter's singing, as she took the solos; never had her voice sounded so clear, so pure, so rich and resonant. Bertha, all her attention given to Miss Carpenter, did not observe a gentleman in clerical attire, who seemed to look at herself as well as at the great lady.

Suddenly there occurred a delay. Several people had gathered round Mr. Mason, and Bertha presently discovered that they were talking of the desirability of introducing some duet, which had not previously been thought of. The strange clergyman, who appeared to be a friend of Mr. Mason's, as he stayed by him all the time,

seemed to urge it strongly.

"I am willing," said Miss Carpenter. "But, is there anyone who

could take it with me?"

Mr. Mason looked round at the different ladies—for the duet was for two trebles—and hesitated. "Could you take it, Mrs. Pembridge?" he asked.

"I dare not," replied the lady addressed. "I should break down from sheer nervousness. To sing before the public is so different from singing amongst ourselves."

" You could take it, I think, Miss Dane?"

Bertha started, hardly believing her ears, or that the organist could be addressing herself. But he was motioning to her to go forward, and she obeyed, a hot colour flushing her cheeks.

"Did you ever try it?" asked Mr. Mason, putting the sheet of

music in her hand.

"Sometimes. With my Uncle Stephen."

Never another word spoke he. Beginning to play, Bertha found she had to sing at once with Miss Carpenter. Two, three times over did they try it. At first Bertha was timid; but as she lost her self-consciousness in the delight the music brought her, she sang her best, and became oblivious to all else: the old plaid shawl slipped off her shoulders, displaying her older dress; and she never once noticed that the eyes of the clergyman were again steadily fixed upon her.

"That will do for now," said Mr. Mason to her. "You can

return to your seat for the last chorus."

The rehearsal over, the room soon cleared itself. Bertha went out last: she never put herself forward before those well-dressed people who let her see that they looked down upon her. At the entrance door below she glanced up the street and down the street, thinking she might see her uncle, for he always came for her. But no: he was not to be seen.

"Neither Aunt Pen nor Sally can have got home," she thought,

"and so he could not come out."

"Are you going home alone, Miss Dane?" asked Mr. Mason, as

he came forth with his clerical friend.

"Yes," she answered. In her eyes this man of music was a very great man, one to be respected almost as a lord. "My uncle has not come for me to-night. I shall soon be there."

She set off with a light, quick step. But had hardly left the street behind her and entered on the country, when the clergyman caught

her up.

"I will walk with you, if you will allow me, Miss Dane," he said. "I find your road lies in the same direction as mine."

"Oh, thank you," she returned; "thank you very much. But

indeed, I am not at all afraid; there's nothing to hurt me."

He seemed a very pleasant man, this clergyman, but quite old compared to Bertha: thirty-four, at least: a rather tall man, with a good, friendly face. They chatted away on many subjects, chiefly on music, and Miss Carpenter's wonderful voice.

"Ay, she'll not stay at Crossdale long," he observed. "A voice

like that must make its mark."

"You are fond of music, are you not?" asked Bertha.
"Very fond of it indeed. But I neither play nor sing."

"Oh, what a pity!"

"Do you think so!" he returned, smiling at her naïve remark. "I can hear others: that is better than singing myself. It—oh, is this your home?"

For Bertha had stopped at the gate. He held his hand out to wish her good night.

"Tell your father that you have been taken care of," he said.

"It is my uncle and aunt that I live with," interrupted Bertha.

"Papa died a long while ago. He was a clergyman."

"A clergyman!" echoed the stranger, some surprise in his tone, as though he thought her poor attire was not much in accordance with what befitted a clergyman's daughter: at least, that was the construction Bertha put upon it. "Dane?—Dane? He was not the Reverend Richard Dane, was he, curate of Allingham?"

"Yes, he was," said Bertha.

The stranger's answer was to take both her hands in his. "We are old friends," he said with enthusiasm. "You don't remember me, I daresay, but I was once staying in your house, reading with your

father. You were a pretty little child of five or six, and I used to nurse you on my knee and call you little Queen Berthy."

"I—think—I do—remember," said Bertha, slowly. "But papa always had young men reading with him. Only one at a time; there was no room for more: as soon as one left, another came."

"And he is dead, you say? Poor Dane! I have not heard of him of late years, but thought he might have got a better curacy—or perhaps a living."

"He died nearly six years ago at Allingham, when I was fourteen.

Mamma died just before him."

"Dear, dear! And you are living here! But I must not keep you any longer, Miss Dane. I hope you will allow me to call and see you, and to make acquaintance with your aunt and uncle. I shall never forget your father's kindness to me."

"Yes, please come," answered Bertha in her unsophisticated way. "I am so glad to meet some one who can talk to me about papa and mamma. Nobody in all Crossdale knew them, except Aunt Penelope. Have you far to go to-night?"

"About three parts of a mile-up to Little Crossdale. Good

night."

From a romance to reality is not far; and having soared with Handel above all temporal and earthly vanities, and just parted with this delightful new friend, Bertha was recalled to earth by the high tones of her aunt's voice, evidently in hot dispute with Unce Stephen.

"It's all nonsense," she was saying as Bertha entered. "If the girl would give up her nonsensical music and attend to her sewing and her housework, it would be better for all of us. Gallivanting out at night instead of darning the stockings, and leaving you at home to look after things! Here I find the lamp in a black smoke, every spark of fire in the house gone out, and you buried in your 'Creation' and 'St. Paul,' and all the rest of the stuff! Where's the good of it?"

"You don't like music, Penelope, and can't understand the good in it. It takes one right out of the world."

"Where's the use of that?" demanded Aunt Pen. "You have

to come back to the world again."

Stephen sighed. Sometimes he did wish he could get out of the world altogether: at any rate, out of the range of its sharp tongues. Bertha, taking the opportunity of a moment's lull, told eagerly of the great honour in store for her—that she was to sing in a duet with Miss Carpenter at the concert. It aroused Aunt Pen's wrath.

"What!" she cried. "Sing a duet in public, in the face and eyes of Crossdale! No, never. You are my own sister's child, and

I'll never see you on the stage-disgracing the family!"

"On the stage! Oh, aunty!"

"It's as bad as the stage," cried Aunt Pen. "Where's the difference?"

"But—this—is—an—oratorio, aunt," said Bertha impressively, the tears starting in her eyes. "And you know that ladies of the

best families in Crossdale are to sing in it."

"I'd not give a penny to hear all the oratorios in the world," retorted Aunt Pen, slightly diverging from the subject, as it is in the habit of talkative ladies to do. "And, pray, where would you get a dress from, to stand up and sing in? The clouds would not rain one down. No; you must just make up your mind to quit the society from to-night, and stay at home."

Bertha burst into tears. Uncle Stephen lighted his pipe meekly, and sat down to smoke it. Just then Sally was heard returning, and

Aunt Pen stalked forth to find fault with her in the kitchen.

"Don't cry, child," said he. "She always says more than she means, you know, when things go wrong: and I did forget the fires and the lamp. It was that made her angry: she thought that it wouldn't have happened but for my letting you go out."

"But, Uncle Stephen, I'd not miss the oratorio for the world. We

have been practising for it so long."

"Oh, she'll let you go when the time comes. And she and I will go too—at least, I will. You will have two tickets given you as a member."

As Bertha dried her eyes, she began telling of the strange clergyman who had walked home with her—and of his having lived with them at home when she was a little child.

"What is his name?" asked Uncle Stephen, putting down his

pipe for a minute in surprise.

"I don't know; I did not hear it, and forgot to ask it," replied Bertha. "He is so very, very nice, Uncle Stephen; it is such a good, pleasant face: and he seems already quite like an old friend."

"A clergyman?" debated Uncle Stephen. "Said he had to go to Little Crossdale? Berthy, I'd not be surprised if he is the new

rector."

"Oh, uncle! But that's such a rich living—nine hundred a year, they say. The rector of Little Crossdale would not be likely to notice me."

"I don't see what the living has to do with it," returned Uncle Stephen. "What was he like, this young man?"

"He has nice blue eyes, and the pleasantest voice and way with

him you ever knew," lucidly replied Bertha.

"Is he tall or short, fat or thin, child?" asked Uncle Stephen, thinking her description a lame one. "A red face or a pale one?"

"He is rather tall and quite thin, uncle; and his face is pale."

"Then I think it is the new rector. His name's Brook."

"But why do you think it, uncle?"

"Yesterday morning, as I was standing at the fence in the meadow, talking to Clutterbuck on the other side of it, a clergyman passed down the road—a youngish man, a few years past thirty. 'That's

Mr. Brook, the new parson at Little Crossdale,' said Clutterbuck to me, and we watched him out of sight. He was like what you describe him to be, Bertha."

"He said he should like to call here, Uncle Stephen. I hope Aunt Pen won't be put out if he does."

"There's no answering for that," said Uncle Stephen.

For once the Fates were propitious. Aunt Pen was in one of her best and brightest humours when Mr. Brook called, and she received him graciously. He had lost no time, for it was only the afternoon following the rehearsal. Mrs. Robarts was really glad to meet one who had lived for two years with her sister, and she talked so much that nobody else could get in a word. She gave him a little of her ideas on the subject of oratorios, as connected with the stage and Astley's Circus, and especially as to Bertha's singing in them in public: and Mr. Brook gave his. It was a holy work, in his opinion, he said; and those who took part in it and those who listened were brought for the time nearer to God. Uncle Stephen's eyes glistened: and Aunt Pen began to think that, after all, she would let the child sing the duet—just for this once.

Mr. Brook was treated to some of Aunt Pen's cowslip wine, and to some seed-cake. He found both excellent. Aunt Pen told him she had made the wine herself and Bertha the cake. Bertha could make cakes with anybody, she added; pies too; jam, and pickles; beds also, when needed: all thanks to her own training of her; she was not going to bring her up to be good only for fal-lals. Mr. Brook's eyes had a laughing light in them as he listened, and Bertha's meek face was glowing with painful blushes. Aunt Pen bade Mr. Brook drop in when he liked at the tea hour, as she shook his hand at parting: and he said he would.

parting: and he said he would.

"Aunt Penelope is not in the least like what mamma was, is she?" cried Bertha in a low appealing tone, as she ran forward, bidden by her aunt, to open the front door for Mr. Brook.

"No, indeed," he answered heartily, the same laughing light

shining in his eyes, as they looked steadily into Bertha's.

A wonderful thing took place. Three days later, as they were finishing breakfast on the Monday morning at Uncle Stephen's, the postman brought a letter for Miss Dane. It was a very rare thing indeed for him to bring a letter at all to the farm, but he had never yet brought one to Bertha. The girl looked at her uncle in indecision: could it be for her?

"Open it, child," said he. Aunt Pen was gone out with a plateful of scraps for the cocks and hens, or she would have opened it herself. It proved to be from Miss Carpenter: asking Miss Dane to

call upon her that morning without any delay.

"Oh, Uncle Stephen! What do you think it can be for?"

"How should I know, child? To try the duet again, perhaps."

"Suppose—suppose Aunt Pen should not let me go?"

"But she must, I think. I am going into Crossdale presently, and will take you."

"Do you think, Uncle Stephen, I might venture to put on my best Sunday things?" questioned Bertha, in a fluttering whisper. "This frock is so shabby; look at it: and Miss Carpenter is always in silks and satins."

"Well, I don't know," replied Uncle Stephen, quite inclined to wink at the implied treachery. "If you could manage to slip out unseen, perhaps—but, if not, you'd be sure to be sent back to take it off."

Aunt Pen gave in to the visit, but not without a vast deal of scolding. This was a busy morning: Monday mornings always were busy; and there were a hundred and one things waiting for Bertha to do. Aunt Pen was down in the cellar, salting some bacon, when Bertha slipped out in the "Sunday things." A ruby merino "frock," as Bertha called it, a nondescript kind of old fur tippet, which had become too small for Aunt Pen, and a black hat with an upright dahlia in it: all very much the worse for wear.

Miss Carpenter was not in silks and satins this morning. She was lying on the sofa in her pretty sitting-room over the hair-dresser's shop, wrapped in a becoming grey dressing-gown with a geranium-coloured shawl upon it. Bertha looked the sorrow she felt when the famous singer spoke in a whisper, being unable to speak in anything else.

"Oh, thank you, Miss Dane! You see how I am: about to be laid up. No singing for me, the doctor says, for the next fortnight. I was in the greatest distress about the sacred concert until I thought of you."

"But what is the matter?" asked Bertha.

"My throat—don't you hear how bad it is; Mr. Glassup fears quinsy. I had it once, some years ago. I am going back to bed presently, and my old aunt is coming to nurse me."

"Yes," observed Bertha, feeling rather bewildered. "And-did

you want me to do anything for you?"

"Why, to be sure I do," cried Miss Carpenter, speaking as briskly as her sore throat permitted. "You must take my place at the concert."

"Oh!" cried Bertha, when able to speak. "I?"

"Yes; you."

"But how could I, Miss Carpenter?"

"Why, very easily, child. I can tell you I was astonished at the quality of your voice, ay, and at your singing, when you tried that duet with me on Thursday evening. You will sing easily all I was about to sing, and sing it well."

"But-I should never have the courage," pleaded Bertha.

"Nonsense. One with your voice and cultivation need not lack that. It's just this, Miss Dane: failing you, the concert cannot take place, for there's nobody else that could even attempt the parts. I am unfortunately debarred singing, and it rests with me, you see, to provide a substitute. Unless I do, all the blame will lie on me. Do try; try your best, for my sake."

"But-there's the anthem?" hesitated Bertha.

"'I know that my Redeemer liveth,' yes," carelessly remarked Miss Carpenter. "Well, you can sing that: it will just suit your

voice and style. Did you ever sing it?"

How many times she had sung it, and how she loved it, Bertha did not care to confess. She felt perfectly bewildered at the prospect opening to her, shrinking from it in modest timidity. Not that she feared her own power and capability, but—she had never

thought to be brought into such publicity.

"Come and run it over for me," said Miss Carpenter, leaving the sofa and crossing the room. "I can tell then whether you may attempt it. Now, don't get timid; just sing as if no one were listening; and let me tell you that is what you must always do in solos; throw your whole soul into the music, forgetting the choir and the audience. The organist will follow you in this, and you'll be sure to make an impression."

Poor Bertha! This sounded like fine satire. However, Miss Carpenter had opened her piano, and was playing the accompaniment with a strong, clear touch. Bertha sang, at first slightly nervous, afterwards thoroughly alive to the necessity of doing her best.

Uncle Stephen must not be disgraced by his one pupil.

"Bravo!" cried Miss Carpenter. "It will do. What a pure style. Just what Mr. Mason admires. You have a good teacher. Then your voice! It is exquisite. How old are you?"

"Nearly twenty," answered Bertha.

"Only that! Why, my dear child, your fortune lies in your

voice. You ought to have come out."

Bertha shook her head. "My aunt and uncle would never let me do that—not come regularly out. Singing with the Philharmonic is different."

"They have scruples, I suppose; many people have. But, let me tell you, my dear, that a public singer, no matter though she be on the operatic boards, may be as pure and good as—ay, almost, I was going to say, as one of heaven's angels, and keep herself so until she shall be called up yonder to join them. Some women are bad, unfortunately there's no denying it; and the taint of them in the public estimation falls on all of us, and we are classed together in a lump as 'those public singers.'"

"That must be like Aunt Pen," thought Bertha.

"I was to be paid well for this concert-twenty pounds," re-

sumed Miss Carpenter, "and I shall give it to you. Your friends would not object to that, I suppose?"

Bertha flushed with amazement, stared, and trembled. Twenty pounds! She had never seen so much money in all her life!

"It is only fair that you should have it," said Miss Carpenter, "if you do the work. And now I will give you a note to carry to Mr. Mason. He does not know of my illness yet. Ask him to practise you two or three times between now and the concert night, and you'll do."

The pleasure in Bertha's tell-tale eyes was read by Miss Carpenter with a smile. The girl had undoubtedly genius. Waiting while the brief note to Mr. Mason was written, Bertha said good morning, and

went away with it.

The sight of Uncle Stephen at the door of the cornchandler's, opposite, recalled Bertha from her blissful visions—for it reminded her that she might not get consent to sing even in this oratorio. He crossed hastily over to her, and heard what had taken place.

Uncle Stephen mused. "Look you, child," he presently observed, "I should like you to do this for Miss Carpenter, and I shall be proud of listening to you, standing up in the hall to sing; though I don't know what your aunt will say to it. But there's one thing, Bertha—you cannot accept money for it. You may take Miss Carpenter's parts, but you must do it as a lady, an amateur. To accept money would be to put you on the same footing as Miss Carpenter, don't you see, child—though I am sure I do not say it in disparagement, for everybody knows that in herself she is most worthy and estimable. You had better go in and tell her this—that you can't take any money. Say that I will allow you to take her parts, and am pleased you should, and that we'll do all we can to induce Mrs. Robarts to allow it: but that I would prefer you to do it without payment."

Back went Bertha with the message. Miss Carpenter came out of

the room to hear it.

"Such nonsense!" she exclaimed. "Such absurd fastidiousness! Well, if people are silly, I can't help it. You will be doing me a very great service, Miss Dane, and I should have liked to make it worth your while.—Stay a moment: I forgot to ask you one thing just now: have you a suitable dress to sing in?"

"This is my best," said Bertha, blushing at having to confess

to so much poverty."

"Oh—that! *That* won't do. Sit down for an instant, child."

Hastily scribbling another note, she directed it to Crossdale's most

fashionable dressmaker, and put it into Bertha's hands.

"You know where Mrs. Tether lives? Well, when your aunt has decided that you may sing, for it seems some difficulty might lie with her, you take this note to Mrs. Tether, and say I sent you. That's all."

Mr. Mason was out of town. Gone for the day to a distant school, where he taught. He would be at the Philharmonic in the evening,

the servant said, for there was to be an extra practice.

During the day Aunt Pen held out well against their hopes, calling it "a plot," and Bertha went about her work with dry, hot eyes: she was too grieved for tears. Just before tea-time the Reverend William Brook came in, availing himself of Mrs. Robarts' general invitation. Aunt Pen opened the budget to him—telling him all: of Miss Carpenter's audacious proposal, and of Bertha's wickedness in wanting to accept it.

"Could she take Miss Carpenter's parts?" asked he of Uncle

Stephen.

"Ay, that she could. And I should like to hear her."

"So should I," added Mr. Brook.

Well, he talked to Aunt Pen. And what with the respect she bore him, and his beautiful sermons—for she had gone twice all the way to Little Crossdale the past day to hear him preach—and the liking she had taken for himself, Aunt Pen suffered her judgment to yield to his, and gave in. Bertha might sing for once, as it was sacred music; the praises of God, as Mr. Brook put it; but she must make her old Sunday things do on the occasion, for she'd have no new ones.

By-and-by they started for the concert-room: Uncle Stephen and Bertha, with Mr. Brook at their side. The organist was already in his place, softly trying some music that lay before him. But few of the society had come yet. Bertha presented him with Miss Carpenter's note. The news of that lady's illness had gone about then,

and Mr. Mason appeared to be no stranger to it.

He looked at Bertha from head to foot as she stood before him:

then read the note a second time, and again looked at her.

"Miss Carpenter says you are fit to take her parts—a dreadful contretemps that she should be ill just now!" he exclaimed testily. "Can you?"

The words were not very encouraging; the manner was still less so.

Bertha hesitated.

"Suppose you try Miss Dane?" said Mr. Brook, coming forward to shake hands with the organist.

"But—'I know that my Redeemer liveth?'" debated the organist.
"It will never do to leave out that. All Crossdale would cry out that we had cheated them."

"Try Miss Dane, Mason. I heard her sing it just now-and I can

only say it satisfied me."

Mr. Mason handed Bertha the music, and struck into the chords at once. It might be well to get the trial over, he perhaps thought, while the room was comparatively empty of hearers. A slight titter ensued from some ladies already there—that meek Bertha Dane, with her shabby clothes, to take Miss Carpenter's place!

Uncle Stephen, waiting for his niece, rejoicing in this wondrous

chance to hear her under favourable auspices, strained his ears to catch the tones of the fresh young voice, which he had trained so patiently. Rather timid at first, Bertha soon forgot herself in the fascination of the music. What could be more delightful than to sing in this place—to feel one's voice ascending and swelling amid these refining influences? She forgot herself and the world; forgot her poor attire and all the rest of the drawbacks: she felt nothing but the heavenly notes, the solemn, beautiful words; she seemed almost to see the Last Day and the descent of the Redeemer.

Her voice ceased. A long breathless pause ensued, broken at last by a low murmur of entranced applause. Mr. Mason seized her

hand in grateful enthusiasm.

"We shall not have to put the concert off or to change the

pieces," cried he.

And as Bertha, flushed with happiness, was turning modestly away to find a seat, she saw Mr. Brook waiting to take her to one—and his eyes were wet with tears. That he should appreciate her was more delightful than all; even than the congratulations and the hand-shakes of those ladies who had tittered at her: and Bertha began to think that she must certainly be in Paradise.

Aunt Pen heard about it all—and from Mr. Brook: for when they got home he ran in with them for a moment to tell the news. It a little impressed even Aunt Pen, and she graciously told Bertha that if there had been time she should have had a new merino frock to

sing in.

It was not needed. On Christmas Eve, two days before the grand event, some boxes directed to Miss Dane arrived from Mrs. Tether's. Aunt Pen, vowing there must be some mistake, turned out the contents: a pretty dress and mantle of grey silk, and a white bonnet. A few pencilled lines lay atop from Miss Carpenter, begging Miss Dane to give her the pleasure of wearing them, in return for the great service she was rendering her. Aunt Pen tossed her head, wondering what the audacity of those "public people" would do next.

But necessity has no law. It was so incongruous for the chief singer in the oratorio to wear an old stuff dress, that Bertha had to

accept the things.

And so much did the dress change her that the Philharmonic Society could not believe its eyes when she appeared in it on the eventful day. Could that stylish, lady-like girl be the shabby little nobody who had come among them in her old plaid shawl? Aunt Pen, condescending to make one of the audience, put on her spectacles to stare as she sat by Mr. Brook.

"My goodness! Well, the child does become her finery! I always became mine. She'll be for wanting to look shy at her work

after this!"

"What would the work do if you had not Bertha?" asked Mr. Brook in her ear.

"I don't know," tartly rejoined Aunt Pen, put out by the suggestion. "The work's not likely to do without her. Why do you invent impossibilities, William Brook?"

"But if it has to?" smiled he. "The truth is, Mrs. Robarts, that

I want Bertha to help me in my work."

"You want—what?" cried Aunt Pen, turning her spectacles upon him.

"I want her to come to Little Crossdale, and—and take up her abode in the rectory."

"What as?—what to do?" retorted Aunt Pen, believing he was losing his senses.

"As my wife. Don't say no, dear Mrs. Robarts. Uncle Stephen will not."

"Well-I-never!" burst forth Aunt Pen, after an astonished

pause. "Do you think you are dreaming?"

"I liked her the first moment I saw her, when she stood in her old shawl, a modest little girl, behind the other ladies at the rehearsal that first night; and her voice charmed me. And, later, when I found she was the daughter of the dear friends of my youth, the same sweet child I used to nurse and fondle—why, I loved her from that moment: though I daresay you will despise me for saying it. I must take her from you, Mrs. Robarts—and I don't care how soon?"

"And I daresay you'd be for letting her sing at these places again!"

"At the Philharmonic meetings-certainly. With the other ladies."

"The world's turned upside down," exclaimed Aunt Pen. "Girls asked in marriage when they are hardly out of their teens—and standing up to sing before a roomful! And what on earth am I to do? I shall have to keep another servant."

All things happen for the best. Aunt Pen found so much more exercise for fault-finding with two servants than she had with one, that she was in her glory. While Uncle Stephen would steal up to the rectory at Little Crossdale every day of his life, and lose himself in the melody he evoked from the grand organ, bought by William Brook for his wife.

THE EVE OF THE FEAST.

By ANNE BEALE.

In the month of April, 1876, a sketch appeared in The Argosy, entitled "Come and Teach Us." It contained an account of the opening of the great Board School in Tower Street, Seven Dials, as a Mission School on Sundays, and of the cry of the children in that low and crowded neighbourhood for teachers on the Lord's Day.

We have again had an invitation to visit the school on Sunday, and accompany its members on their treat on Monday. A few details of what has been accomplished in something less than a year and a

half may not be uninteresting.

Before half-past six we found the school doors besieged by a crowd of children of both sexes, a stalwart policeman in their midst to keep order and prevent ingress until the appointed hour. No sooner did the half-hour strike than the good-natured policeman yielded, and in clattered and clamoured the children, through the cool passages, up the broad stone, many-flighted staircases, into the large, airy, well-There was a great uproar, and much excitement, lighted rooms. before the motley crowd settled down; the notes of a harmonium were heard in each of the principal class-rooms, and the huge building soon resounded with hymns. The voices, if not always tuneful, were yet in tune, and came forth with volume, heart and will. Then, at the words "All cover your faces," the heads bent, and a prayer was offered up for the children, their teachers, and their school. eight hundred young immortals, many of whom, two years ago, had, perhaps, scarcely heard of God, have been taught to worship Him, their Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

Yes: the school, which numbered when last we visited it, from three to four hundred, has now eight hundred on its books, of whom six hundred are present on this particular Sunday evening. Teachers have also multiplied, though recruits would still be gladly welcomed. A sewing-class, a singing-class, and a penny bank have also been commenced on week-day evenings during the interval; and their good effects are manifest, not only in the voices, but the appearance of the children. If every board-school throughout the land could thus be opened on Sunday for religious teaching, there would be, indeed, hope for England's future. When efficient secular training and pure spiritual instruction go hand-in-hand, then she will have obedient subjects and

good citizens.

"The great unwashed" is no longer an apt epithet for the young folk of Tower Street Mission School, and, indeed, the word "ragged" would scarcely apply, though clothes of every colour, fabric, and stage of decadence appear. Faces and hands are scrupulously clean,

and even the hair neat. The heads of many little maidens bristle with curl-papers artistically twisted, for it is the eve of the treat, and all reply, when questioned, "It is against to-morrow, teacher." For three months, at least, has this treat been the goal towards which Rewards are more effectual than punishall efforts have tended. Indeed, all the year through, it is looked forward to with eager hope and anxiety; but, when it approaches, nothing can exceed the excitement. The sewing-classes are crowded with girls anxious to manufacture some bit of finery into a suitable garment-it matters not of what texture, provided it be only smart and fashionable. the teacher manages to inspire independence and self-respect, through this excusable longing to be smart. She encourages them to save up their money to buy the old garments sent to her, and with their pence and shillings purchases more useful articles, to be again similarly disposed of. Any lady who has clothes to give away, however apparently unsuitable, would find them utilised in Seven Dials and St. Giles's.

The boys are, for the most part, respectably attired, for, with few exceptions, they are earning wages, and are learning to spend them with some discretion. In spite of drunken fathers or mothers, and too often wretched homes, they are learning self-reliance, which shows itself in their improved dress and manners. One tells us he earns five shillings a week as a printer's boy, another as a smith—others are engaged at the black-lead works, others at Crosse and Blackwell's—and all, who will, find occupation, from twelve years old and upwards.

And let us glance at the teachers as they sit surrounded by eager and attentive learners. They are mostly young men and women who are engaged all the week through in the great houses of business in this wonderful city of London. Labouring hard for six days, they yet devote the seventh to their poorer brethren, and often their week-day evenings.

We remembered, on our former visit, a young man who stood amidst a crowd of boys, striving hopelessly to gain and keep their attention. His efforts were vain. Now he sits quietly in one of the smaller class-rooms, the centre of an eager, earnest throng, who give him little or no trouble. He says that he, like many another, owes not only his own religious impressions, but his consequent success in life, to what he learnt at a Sunday-school, and he therefore employs his leisure in teaching others to "do likewise." He and his compeers certainly read us all a lesson of patient perseverance.

And none more effectually than the teacher of the infant class. Eighteen months ago she had seventy babies before her; she has now two hundred, for no one has, as yet, offered to aid her who has the necessary special aptitude for the work. Still she walks to and fro, hearing hymns and texts, and winning infantile hearts. Suddenly the little voices are raised, and hers surmounts the hubbub with difficulty, for the tickets for the treat are about to be distributed.

The forms are vacated, and pattering feet resound. But, alas! all cannot be made happy, for many are strangers, who have come in hopes of a ticket; others have attended irregularly, or have been naughty, and must not be rewarded.

"Are you to have a ticket—and you, and you?" we ask of the hoping, waiting little ones, who sit on with folded arms and glisten-

ing eyes.

"I don't know, teacher-I think so," they reply.

And in due time their patience is rewarded. One by one they receive the ornamented pink card, with their name in its midst, and

troop off exultant.

But even amongst these are some who may yet be disappointed—whose drunken father or mother may, in a fit of passion, refuse to let them go. There is one whose father, in a fit of drunkenness, caused his wife's death. Another was found with a respectable mother and six brothers and sisters in an empty room, the so-called "bread-winner" having sold every article of furniture for drink.

"I am glad it is all gone, for there is now nothing to dispose of!"

cried the despairing wife from a bundle of straw.

And still a gin-palace stands at the corner of every street! Oh, let us multiply drinking-fountains, coffee-palaces, people's cafés, tea and cocoa rooms: that our brothers and sisters may slake their

thirst with what kills neither body nor soul.

"Oh, I hope it will be fine to-morrow! Do you think it will be fine?" is the cry through the great building, as the tickets are distributed in each class-room. The distributors try to deal out impartial justice, but many are the complaints. At one desk a melancholy-looking black-haired mother stands with her baby at her breast, pleading for her boy, who has lost his ticket for non-attendance; but she pleads in vain.

"We would gladly give to all, but we must draw the line," is the comment, as she disappears to join other anxious mothers who are

crowding the street without.

Again the policeman is there, his back to the entrance, his face set, firm but kindly, to the expectant throng. Happy she who sees her child appear with the coveted pink ticket, and sorely disappointed and aggrieved are those who—comparatively few—are doomed to behold them without one. But for the arm of the law the gates would be forced, for amongst the crowd is many a virago whose tongue neither law

nor justice can silence.

Costermongers' barrows line the streets. They were full in the morning for the Sunday market, but are mostly empty now. Many of the class have been induced to give up Sunday trading, and declare themselves better off than before; while some of the shops are also closed. But of those who continue it, numbers fill the gin-palaces that flame with light as we pass them. Here a woman reels out; there another, with children in her arms or hand, goes in.

Children, that are yet "heirs of salvation!" The streets are always full of them, despite the hundreds that fill the school. They are dancing and shouting at ten o'clock at night, although in almost every window of each six-storied house a light seems to bid them come to bed. Still matters are mending. The board-school has opened its capacious playgrounds of an evening for the children, and thus the streets are thinned, and danger to life and limb lessened. Also, in this parish of St. Giles's, the disused burial grounds of Old St. Pancras have been turned into gardens of some six or seven acres in extent, and devoted to the use of the people. Every available space should be made pleasant to the eyes and soothing to the minds of the multitudes who see and feel little but grime and depressing atmosphere.

By ten o'clock on Monday morning about five hundred children and their teachers find themselves on a broad heath in Kent, a special train having conveyed them. Happily the morning is fine, though fleecy clouds rove hither and thither, as if chasing the swift-footed children. It is a cool, grey day, made for sports and rambles, so no time is lost in pursuing them. But, alas, as the morning advances, the day darkens. A fatal combat begins up above between the clouds and the straggling sunbeams, and the clerk of the weather fails to

keep order, and this our sketch is sadly damped.

But old Father Time manages better, for precisely at midday the tent fills with a hungry multitude, ready for meat and fruit pies. But not even the cravings of appetite, about to be amply satisfied, can

prevent anxiety.

And, alas! the rain comes down. Now in fleeting showers—anon in heavy sheets. Cloudland has won the victory, and, before tea-time, has emptied itself of water enough to refresh the earth and drench the children. Drenched, but not daunted! No sooner does a bit of blue sky appear than they are off afar, teachers and all, returning with huge nosegays, wet with heaven's dew, and faces red with rain and excitement. Can they be the cheeks that looked so pale in the gas glare of the previous evening? Many are fresh and fair as angels' faces, and glow like the heather and poppies they carry.

Many were the bags that contained a portion of the feast for the friends at home. One pale, quiet little girl especially attracted us, whose red bag was full. Her bit of smartness was a sealskin rinking

cap, which she was holding in one hand to dry.

"I'm saving it for mother and brother, please, teacher," she said apologetically; and when tea-time came, we perceived that all the cake was added to the store. "I've eat the bread-and-butter, please,

teacher, and drunk the tea," she said appealingly.

Who amongst us would be so self-denying? and who shall describe that tea-time, whether children's or teachers? All the five hundred filled the tent. It was an hour for the display of character and colour. The scarlet cloaks were conspicuous; polonaises of every form and

flounce prevailed; hats were adorned with wreaths new and old; most of which had been carefully covered with handkerchiefs. And if somewhat tawdry and drenched with rain, they were all clean.

"This is a hopeful sight indeed: one I never expected to see," said a gentleman present. "I have known St. Giles's forty years, and I thank God that the tide of improvement has flowed in at last.

Ragged and Sunday schools have done the work."

"Hopeful even for the animals," we reflected as we stood outside the stifling tent, near a patient donkey harnessed to a provision-drag. A dozen boys had mounted the barrow, and were urging the donkey to move on. We ventured on the following astute remark.

"I like donkeys, but you don't like them, or you wouldn't put such

a load as that upon them."

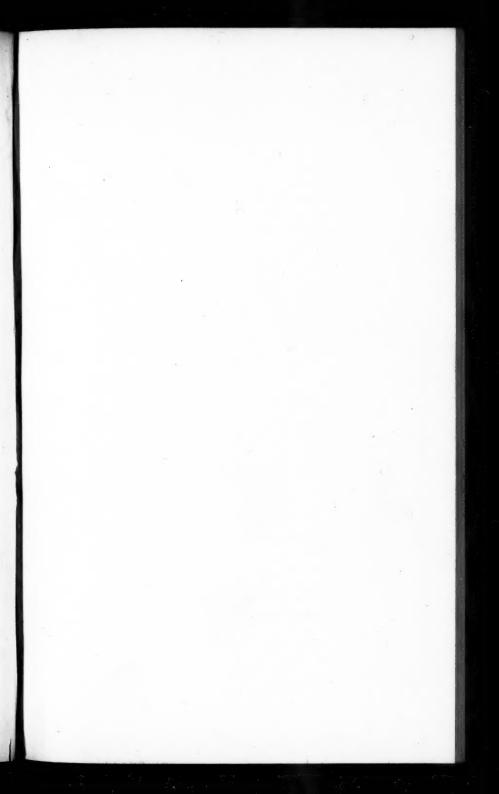
"I does like donkeys," cried several, aggrieved; and one or two jumped off and began to fondle and stroke the animal with genuine tenderness.

The rain temporarily ceased before we mustered for return to the station. A hymn, a farewell glance at the heath, and they troop off in pairs. The lane that was dry sand in the morning is now a rivulet. But the setting sun gleams on the rain-besprinkled trees, the emerald fields, the folded sheep, the gipsies' tent; and the children shout for joy. Despite the wetting, they make the country resound with their mirth as they tumble into the train and steam off for town. The teachers are excited as they take their places amongst them and listen to their various accounts of the day. A day to be remembered and discussed until another year shall have rolled away, and generous hearts are opened to repeat the pleasure.

Again are the gates of Tower Street Board and Mission School besieged by anxious mothers. Neither sorrow nor suffering can press out maternal love. Nothing but drink will do that. "Mother, here I am!"—and the soaking little ones are enfolded in the maternal

arms.

Pity those who have no such arms to shelter them! For there are many who wander away, alone and uncared for, to their miserable dens. Yes, "the children's souls, which God is calling sunward," are often stifled ere they learn to glance above. Let us help to give them light.





AT

PÆSTUM